

BILL POPEJOY

VOL. 1

MEDITATIONS ON THE PROPHETIC
BOOK OF NEW TESTAMENT
SCRIPTURE, THE REVELATION

THE PATMOS PAPERS



REVELATION 1:1

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ,
which God gave unto him, to shew
unto his servants things which must
shortly come to pass; and he sent
and signified it by his angel unto
his servant John.*

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THE PATMOS PAPERS

VOL. 1

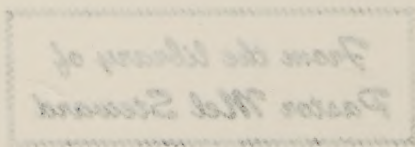
by
BILL POPEJOY

*From the library of
Pastor Mel Steward*



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Published by Testimony Publications
Box 161, Belton, Missouri 64012

Printed in the United States of America



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PREFACE

If the Preacher of Old Testament Scriptures were living today, he might want to rewrite Ecclesiastes 12:12 to make it read: "Of making many books *on prophecy* there is no end!"

However, I make no apology for beginning a series of books about the writings of the seer on Patmos—the book of Revelation. Each of us has a niche to fill in the Master's plan, and we are given no choice but to do our best to fulfill the ministry He has given us, however inadequate we may feel. Maybe someone will read these unskilled lines and will be motivated to prepare for the coming of the Lord. If so, my efforts will be more than rewarded.

But whether men respond or not, the command of the Lord to "write" must be obeyed.

To me, there is a special significance in the title, *The Patmos Papers*. John wrote Revelation while in a place of utmost suffering and anguish. He was in prison, but there he lifted his eyes and saw "the revelation of Jesus Christ." And whether or not anyone understood his manuscripts, his vision into the future—while in a place that portended death—compelled him to write with a fervor that has led some even to question his identity.

Every man has his Patmos. I have written every line of this little book during a series of operations for cancer. As the final manuscript is being prepared, I am recuperating from the ninth surgery for this awful malady. There have been times when I have stood very close to eternity, for cancer always sounds like death. And I have received revelations on my

little "Patmos" that I could have received nowhere else. How wonderful it is to be "in the Spirit" while on "Patmos"!

So, you see, I must write. The truths given to John are the bases for these pages: they are truths the world needs to hear. Those truths have taken on new meaning for me because of the experiences God has allowed me to go through. And in a sense I am writing my own personal *Patmos Papers*. All who have been on Patmos understand the meaning of this testimony.

None of these pages are intended to be argumentative. They are, however, intended to stir the believers into a new state of readiness and to open the eyes of those who are not "in Christ" to the awfulness of facing eternity without God.

I am not a journalist. The mistakes in grammar are unintentional. I trust that you will pardon the errors in writing, and will hear the message.

The italics in scriptures printed here are my own. They are for the sake of emphasis only, and must not be seen in the same light as italics in the King James Bible.

Sincere thanks are extended to those who have permitted me to quote from their copyrighted materials.

I am indebted to Linda Morris, Alma Jones, and Jan Creighton who have typed and retyped manuscripts. Especially do I thank my wife, Doris, who has typed manuscripts, proofread materials, and offered invaluable counsel and courage—for she has been with me on Patmos.

Most of all, I bow the knee before Jesus, who turns Patmos into paradise!



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1 THE LAST PAGE OF THE BOOK

A young boy was reading a mystery book after going to bed at night. His mother came into the room and instructed him to turn out the light and go to sleep. He asked for, and was given, permission to read for only five more minutes. Hurriedly he turned to the last chapter and read the closing pages of the mystery. Soon, lying in the dark, he smiled and talked aloud to some of the characters in the middle of the book, saying, "If you just knew what I know! I've read the last page of the book! I know how it's all going to come out!"

God's people should have exactly the same feeling about the book called "The Revelation." It solves the mystery. It is the last page of the Book, and graphically portrays how it is all going to come out. It solves the riddles of time and space. It dissolves all doubts about the sovereignty of God.

The Bible has one theme. It is *the revelation of the divine plan for the redemption of both this fallen Adamic race and this fallen planet on which he now dwells*. The opening pages of Scripture tell of the fall of man and the curse placed upon him

and upon the ground for his sake. The book of Genesis, which is the genetics of divine revelation, presents the problem; Revelation, the apocalypse of the eternal purpose of God, discloses the solution. All that begins in Genesis ends in Revelation.

The Bible closes as gloriously as it begins. Although its pages are replete with skirmishes between right and wrong, between good and evil, between God and the devil—and, more times than we like to admit, evil wins—you must not put the Book down until you have read the last page! The “last enemy” (I Corinthians 15:26) is not defeated until you approach the very closing lines of Scripture and read, “And there shall be no more death” (Revelation 21:4). The opening words of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), are completed by the voice heard on Patmos, “Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:3). The Bible makes sense only as it is seen in transition from Genesis to Revelation. Stop anywhere along the line, and your faith will bog down in the quagmire of doubt and frustration. The Book must have a last page.

The Christian life is built on hope. Like Abraham, the father of the faithful, we sojourn “in a strange land,” looking “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:9, 10). We believe that “if in this life

only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Corinthians 15:19). The only reason we can endure the rigors of living for God in an ungodly world is this: We "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). We belong to the tomorrow generation!

The book of Revelation announces the restoration of all that was lost in Genesis. In Genesis a beautiful Paradise was lost; in Revelation a more beautiful Paradise is regained. In Genesis man was forbidden access to the tree of life; in Revelation a redeemed race is invited to eat of it. Genesis tells about the first heaven and the first earth; Revelation unfolds the vision of the new heaven and the new earth. Genesis records the details of man's first encounter with the devil; Revelation records Satan's final overthrow and his eternal doom. Genesis tells of the arrival of sin, sorrow, and suffering into the human family; Revelation tells of the end of all these things. In Genesis there was the first death; in Revelation there is the promise of no more death. Genesis recounts the occasion of the first tears; Revelation predicts that God shall wipe all tears from the eyes of His redeemed ones. In Genesis we read about the first Adam who was given dominion over the living creatures on the earth; in Revelation our enraptured eyes behold the last Adam who is given sovereign dominion over all things. Genesis tells about the first marriage, when Adam and Eve became one;

Revelation apprises us of the eternal marriage between Christ and His Church. Genesis records the details of man's great rebellion in the attempted building of the tower of Babel; Revelation paints the lurid scene of the ultimate demise of Babylon and its system.

In Genesis the Word of God is doubted, questioned, tampered with, and added to; in Revelation the warning is given: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18, 19). Thus, we will treat these pages with the reverence they demand and deserve. We are neither allowed to ignore them nor to multiply them.

To man's shame it must be confessed that very few have ever taken God's prophets seriously. The prophet's message has either been denied altogether or it has been postponed into the nebulous future: "he prophesieth of the times that are far off" (Ezekiel 12:27). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, accused the religious world of his day: "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (Acts 7:52). Jesus Himself charged, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the

sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city" (Matthew 23:29-34).

Why is the prophet such a hated man? Religious people have always treated priests with reverence and respect; why this "thing" against prophets? This answer is twofold, and involves both the ministry of the prophet and the message of the prophet.

First, *his ministry*. The ministry of the prophet is best seen in contrast to the ministry of the priest. The priest speaks to God on man's behalf; the prophet speaks to man on God's behalf. And not many people want to hear what God has to say to them.

Second, *his message*. It is, I fear, largely presumed that the prophet's message is solely predictive. But if it were, the prophet would be the most popular man on earth today. Everybody wants to know the future. Billions of dollars are spent annually trying to peer into tomorrow. The paraphernalia of the trade includes horoscopes,

ouija boards, tarot cards, crystal balls, and black magic itself.

But the prophet's message is more than predictive; it is practical. It not only tells of the glories of an eternal future with God and the horrors of an eternal future without God; it instructs a man how to live today in the light of eternity. Without equivocation, without apology, and without alternative, the prophet declares, "This is the way! Walk ye in it!"

The prophet's message cannot be examined in the test tube of human logic. It is not unreasonable, yet it transcends reason. The prophet is in touch with the God who "inhabiteth eternity" (Isaiah 57:15). His message is from the One who is the Omega, who declares "the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). The prophet has no more control over the content of his message than a meteorologist has over tomorrow's weather. The prophet is in sales, not management.

Revelation, the prophetic book of the New Testament, does not bicker. Although it abounds in metaphors, symbolisms, and similes (which are not hid from the mind of the hungry believer), the affirmations of the book are emphatic. "I saw." "I heard." "Behold, he cometh." "They sang a new song." "I was in the Spirit." "There were great voices in heaven." "The accuser of our brethren is cast down." "Whosoever was not found written in

the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Revelation tells it like it will be. It presents a heaven to be gained and a lake of fire to be shunned. It is not impressed by a man's education or discouraged by his lack of it. Neither the bank book of finance nor the blue book of society can effect any change on the events to come. The things which are important to men here and now, such as culture, heritage, and popularity, are totally ignored. Revelation, which tells of all men's future, sees all as sinners who need to be saved by the grace of God.

When people are most serious about this thing called life, two questions are uppermost in their minds: "Where did I come from, and where am I going?" The book of Genesis tells where you came from, the book of Revelation tells that you are going into one of two eternal destinies, and the rest of the Bible tells how to prepare for the world to come. Revelation does not exist to scare you but to inform and to warn you. You can no more blame the Bible for the "judgment to come" (Acts 24:25) than you can blame a lighthouse for the dangerous reef on which it stands. The lighthouse did not create the reef; it only warns of its existence. Revelation did not create eternal wrath; it only warns of its existence.

Revelation must not be ignored. Its difficulties in interpretation should be all the more reason for studying it diligently. Its predictions are accurate. Its warnings are inviolable. Its instructions are unimpeachable. There is no mote in its eye: it sees

clearly. And its message is authentic.

Critics have tried to refute it. They have strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel (Matthew 23:24). They have tried to tear its pages from the canon of sacred Scriptures. They have attempted to reduce it to the level of human logic. They have introduced unscriptural rules of interpretation, such as the preterist, historical, or spiritual schools of interpretation. They have amplified the errors of the naïve, making all their study of the Book end in the ludicrous.

Yet the Revelation still stands! And as we approach the end of the age, men are opening these last pages of Scripture more and more. Prophecies which had been “sealed till the time of the end” (Daniel 12:9) are being revealed by the Holy Spirit. Many of God’s people believe that the last generation (Luke 21:32) before the rapture of the Church is now alive, that the stage is set for the beginning of Daniel’s seventieth week. And they are reading Revelation.

We must beware, however, lest we study prophecy only out of curiosity. Vance Havner, the great Baptist evangelist, said that many people are seeking to discover what the fourth toe on the left foot of some beast in Bible prophecy stands for, while they themselves have never used either foot to go with the Gospel. They are diligent, he says, in their search for the meaning of six-six-six, while ignoring the fact that a world is sick-sick-sick and in need of a Savior.

Let us approach the last page of the Book with an open mind and an open heart. The eternal God has not arbitrarily *ordained* the future; He *knows* it. There is no fatalism in this confidence. We are given a choice: We can be on the Winner's side, or we can be on the loser's side. Why debate the issue? God is going to win! And we are permitted to share in His triumph!

2 THE KEY TO REVELATION

There are two ways to study the book of Revelation. We can stumble and blunder through it, using the trial-and-error method, never knowing for sure if there is any logical sequence to the many predicted events. Or we can use the divinely provided key and watch everything fall beautifully into place.

The former method may not be *wrong*, but it is *costly*. It takes a lot of time—and time is running out. We may not have twenty more years in which to learn by our mistakes. At the outset of the Book the Holy Spirit said, “The time is at hand” (1:3), and at the very close of it Jesus testified, “Surely I come quickly” (22:20). Whatever other ramifications these verses may have, one truth is so clear it must not be overlooked: *The message of Revelation carries a burning urgency!* It transcends “food for thought”; it is “food for action.”

Yes, you may decide to spend five years in research of this great prophetic book of Scripture. And you may do it, should Jesus tarry. But I promise you, before you are very far along in your studies a

fire will begin to burn in your soul. Your heart will cry out, "If these things are going to soon transpire on this planet, I need to get busy pointing lost souls to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World!"

By nature, the prophetic message is urgent. It opens the eyes to the brevity of time and impresses upon the soul the magnitude of eternity. It cries, "*Now* is the accepted time! *Today* is the day of salvation!" You cannot minor in the truths of Revelation; start spending a little time in the Apocalypse and you will major in it.

Thus, it is imperative that the student of Revelation find the key. He has no time to waste in trial and error.

The *outline* of the Book, as we shall later study, is in 1:19. This means that the bulk of Revelation is in Part Three—"the things which shall be hereafter."

The Key to Revelation Is Daniel. Specifically, the key to Revelation 4:1 to 19:10 is Daniel 9:24-27. And the last verse of that Old Testament passage, verse 27, sets the pattern for most of the events seen in Revelation. Failure to interpret the message of the prophet on Patmos in the light of the message of the prophet in Babylon ends in confusion, confusion, and confusion.

Inasmuch as we are not at this time in a study of the book of Daniel, we will make no attempt to enlarge upon the truths to which we will call your attention. But if you intend to become a serious student of the prophetic Word, begin with Daniel.

There *must* be at least a working knowledge of what that Old Testament seer said; otherwise you will be opening a door without a key.

Daniel saw a vision of seventy weeks, all relating to the nation of Israel. For scholarly and fundamental research into this prophecy I recommend *The Coming Prince*, by Sir Robert Anderson (Kregel Publications); *Daniel, the Key to Prophetic Revelation*, by John F. Walroord (Moody Press); *Daniel Speaks Today*, by Myer Pearlman (Gospel Publishing House); *Daniel*, by Philip R. Newell (Moody Press); *Daniel, the Prophet*, by M. R. DeHaan (Zondervan). There are also many other good books on Daniel. And if worst comes to worst, you may want to read my own *Lectures on Daniel*.

I have listed these well-known books in order that when I tell you the pattern and the time of the seventy weeks you will understand that I am in good company. Do not protest seriously until you have studied!

A “week” is a period of seven years—and God’s year has 360 days. Seventy periods of seven years each are involved in this prophecy—altogether 490 years. The starting date was the first of Nisan, 445 B.C. Seven weeks (or forty-nine years) later, the Temple was restored. Sixty-two weeks (or 434 years) later, Messiah was rejected. Then this particular clock of prophecy stopped; Daniel never saw the Church Age. There is yet one more week to be fulfilled in this important prophecy. We call it Daniel’s seventieth week.

And more than fifteen chapters in the Revelation describe that week. Inasmuch as the divine predictions were minutely and amazingly accurate in the fulfillment of the first sixty-nine weeks, we are firmly convinced that the final week will also be just like God said it will be.

One hurdle is past. We *know* that a period of seven years will precede Armageddon. We further know that Daniel's seventieth week will begin—after the Church has been translated—when “the prince that shall come” confirms the Abrahamic covenant with Israel for seven years. It is also written that “in the midst of the week” the covenant will be broken, and the “abomination of desolation” will occur. And the Revelation informs us that 1,260 days after the abomination of desolation Jesus will come back to this earth to claim His planet.

More hurdles are past. We *know* what will happen at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the seven-year period.

Two more truths clarify the picture further. Inasmuch as the “covenant” will be confirmed at the beginning of the week and will not be broken until the middle of it, we know that the first half of the week will be a time of apparent peace and prosperity. And inasmuch as our Lord in Matthew 24:15 quoted Daniel's words of Daniel 12:1, insisting that the abomination of desolation will be followed by a time of great tribulation “such as never was,” we know that the last half of the week will be Great Tribulation.

The basic outline of the week is now clear. Why? Because we have the key—Daniel. All five of these key-truths were revealed through Daniel: *one*, the week will begin with the confirming of the covenant; *two*, the first half of the week will resemble peace; *three*, an awful event called “the abomination that maketh desolate” will be in the middle of the week; *four*, the last half of the week will be Great Tribulation; and *five*, the coming of the Lord will end Satan’s day (see Daniel 2:44, 45 and 7:9-14).

Armed with these basic facts, we will not enter the study of “the things which shall be hereafter” unprepared. We will have done our homework. The overall scheme will be clear. We used the key.

(Lest you fail to understand what I mean by the “key,” it can be easily seen by another scriptural illustration. What did John the Baptist mean when he called Jesus “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”? There is no way that you can explain how Jesus is the Lamb of God without using an Old Testament key. Take Exodus 12 from your Bible, and you will have lost that key. All other evidence will be piecemeal. Yes, there are many other Old Testament sacrifices of lambs, but only the passover lamb made them significant.)

The key, however, only unlocks the door. It lets you into the house. But having a key and setting up housekeeping are two different things.

When we begin the study of Revelation chapter four, you will notice—on our chart of Daniel’s

Seventieth Week—that we have departed from the traditional placing of events. There is no inference in Revelation that it is written in sequence. If it were, it would be unique among all the prophetic writings of Scripture. I simply ask you to think on these things. Do not judge by first impression.

I have been accused of arbitrarily rearranging and dividing the order of events to come. Let me assure you that this arrangement was anything but arbitrary. I am instructed in Scripture to “study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*” (II Timothy 2:15). The Bible is its own best interpreter.

We will study Revelation in the light of Daniel, knowing that as God reveals more of His will to men, He builds upon the foundation He himself has already laid. We will remember that “no scripture is of any private interpretation” (II Peter 1:20), and that the Bible is a complete Book.

We humbly hope that the prayer of our Lord may be fulfilled in us: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Matthew 11:25, 26).

We seek not *new* revelation, but *true* revelation. We will not hesitate to follow tradition when it follows Scripture. We will not hesitate to depart from tradition when it departs from Scripture.

The times are too momentous to quibble. Israel is

home. Russia is contemplating invading Israel. Ten countries are coming together, and their strained unity fulfills prophecy. The man of sin may be well known in the world.

And Jesus said, "When these things *begin* to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). "But," someone inquires, "what if you're wrong in your correlating of predicted events and in your assumption that present world conditions indicate the end of the age?"

What if I'm right?

3 THE UNVEILING

Six vital truths about the book of Revelation are set forth in its first verse. Call them introductory if you wish, but they are also comprehensive and transcendent. There is no faint glow in the eastern horizon, betraying the gradual dawning of a new day; suddenly it is light! We have difficulty adjusting our eyes to the sublimity of it. The curtain is opened, and we behold the glory.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.—Revelation 1:1.

I. THE TITLE

This is not “the Revelation of St. John the Divine,” but “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ.*” Nor may we consider this book merely a revelation of prophecy. “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (19:10). This is the revelation of our Lord. It is “*Apokalupsis Iesou Christou*,” literally, “an unveiling of Jesus Christ.” During His days on earth, our Savior was veiled. Men saw Jesus, but only spiritual perception could discern the Christ.

Once, in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus “asked his disciples, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:13-17).

Peter had a revelation. He looked at Jesus and saw Christ! Such transcendent perception cannot be naturally acquired. “The world by wisdom knew not God” (I Corinthians 1:21). “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Corinthians 2:7, 8). Had the world been able to see through the veil of His flesh (Hebrews 10:20), they would have seen the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed One of God. And, of course, they would not have crucified Him.

When Simon Peter confessed that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” our Lord not only affirmed that such knowledge is a product of divine revelation; He also announced that on this revelation He will build His Church. “And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock [this revelation that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ

of God] I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The Church is built upon this foundation and no other: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." And the task of the Church to this very day is that of removing the veil so men can see that Jesus is the Christ (see II Corinthians 5:6-6:1).

Four evangelists recorded the ministry of our Lord on earth. Of the four, only John could properly write, "we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). Matthew never saw it; and so far as the record is concerned, Mark and Luke never saw Jesus in the flesh. According to tradition, Mark's information came from Peter, and Luke's source was Mary the mother of Jesus.

Only three men physically saw the Christ during His days on earth; all others who saw Him as the Christ did so by revelation. Peter, James, and John went with the Lord to the top of the mount of transfiguration. There Jesus "was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment as white as the light." Soon "a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid" (Matthew 17:2, 5, 6). They saw Christ. For a few moments the veil was removed, and with their eyes they saw Jesus as the Christ.

Saul of Tarsus saw Him later. A bitter enemy of

the Church, Saul was on the road to Damascus, carrying credentials authorizing more persecution of the saints. Then He saw the Christ. When the voice from heaven identified Himself as "Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest" Saul surrendered. "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:8, 10). This had been Saul's trouble all along; he had not been able to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God. After the miracle on the Damascus road, Paul could write, "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11, 12). Though he had seen the Lord, his *ministry* was founded solely on a revelation!

The veil of Christ's flesh was a stumbling block to many. Although astonished at His teachings and His miracles, they were yet without revelation, and they asked, "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?" (Matthew 13:54-56). And they were offended in Him. They were never able to grasp His grandeur. Living in the same town, or the same country, blinded their eyes. "How can He possibly be the divine Son of God? We grew up together!"

Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned (I Corinthians 2:14). And we may only learn by

revelation. Thus Jesus prayed, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast *revealed* them unto babes" (Matthew 11:25).

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ." This was the theme of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost and was in fact the crux of his whole message. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). This single plea of the apostle was at one and the same time the most basic and the most profound need of Israel—and it is to this day the greatest need of mankind.

The record of Jesus of Nazareth is a fact of history. We acknowledge it every time we write the date on a check. We acknowledge it when we pick up a newspaper, or fill out a form, or place an order, or mail a letter. The fact of Jesus so changed human history that all dates are related to Him. (It was amusing to note how those who, a few years ago, protested the reading of Scripture by astronauts in space thought they won their battle. But when a plaque with a *date* on it was later left on the moon, a record of Jesus was left there. You can't get away from the fact that Jesus lived!)

But the record that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God is not a fact of history. No textbook can prove it. No doctrines of the Church can substantiate it. *This truth comes only by revelation!*

And it is unveiled only to babes—to those who are willing to receive it.

You see, Christianity is more than mental assent to a truth. You can, of course, read in history books about great and intellectual men who called Jesus the Christ. But to infer that “their recommendation is good enough for me” will come woefully short of the mark. *Each man must have his own personal revelation* or his religion will be head-knowledge only, and will in no way surpass the unchristian cults which deny the veracity of the Bible.

Let the veil be removed. For men living in Palestine in New Testament times, the veil was the Lord’s body. They simply could not look at a Neighbor of theirs and believe that He was the mighty God. It was hard to accept the fact that the Man from Nazareth who assembled furniture in Joseph’s shop also created the wood! The body of Jesus was the veil which kept men from seeing the Christ.

Times have changed. The fact that Jesus walked the dusty roads of Galilee doesn’t disturb us anymore. In fact, distance has lent enchantment; the Christian world is happy to equate the Nazarene with the Christ. Every facet of His earthly life draws us to Him. We love Him for His humanity.

But the veil has not disappeared. It has merely changed. *Familiarity with the gospel* is a veil which keeps many from seeing Christ as He is. Because of this veil, the love of many has waxed cold. Religion has become a form. Prayer has become a ritual.

Church attendance has become a drudgery. The very thing which should produce holiness has created carelessness.

Men in Galilee long ago could not see Christ; they were too near to Him to see Him! And though times have changed, this principle has not: Many who should recognize Jesus as the Christ are so familiar with Him that it is impossible to behold His glory.

We dare not enter the study of the book of Revelation until we see Jesus Christ. When we see Him as He is, we, like John on Patmos, will fall at His feet as dead. The three apostles on the mount of transfiguration fell. Saul of Tarsus fell. Isaiah fell. Ezekiel fell. And so must we!

Understand this carefully, for it is the principle most basic to the study of prophecy: *The book of Revelation has become an argumentative book only because students have detoured the first line!* We are in no condition to walk on the holy ground of inspired predictive utterances until we have a personal and genuine "revelation of Jesus Christ." Seeing Him, arguments are settled; who can analyze absolute light? Seeing Him, doubts vanish; if He says it, who can question it? Seeing Him, the splitting of theological hairs comes to an end; only one thing matters: Is my heart right with God?

When, in your conscientious study of prophecy, you are faced with impasses, dilemmas, and questions, return to this line: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." Wait in His presence until you see His glory. In rapture, you will no longer fret about the

correct chronology or about the precise meaning of certain colors and symbols. With Paul you will cry out, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians 3:10). You will desire only to excel in knowing Christ.

The view of His glory will clear up your vision. The cobwebs will vanish from your mind. The rest of the book will abound in rapturous and relevant truth, because you put first things first: you began with "the revelation of Jesus Christ."

4 THE SOURCE OF TRUTH

The title of the Bible's closing book, the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, is the summation of its contents. It is a prelude to the event announced in 1:7, the text of Revelation, and seen in 19:11-16. That future physical fact is now a transcendent spiritual truth to the believer. It is also the first of six fundamentals listed in the opening verse of Revelation. We noted it in the last lesson. And we now move to the second basic premise in this verse.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.—Revelation 1:1.

II. ORIGIN

1. *The principle proclaimed.*

"Which God gave unto him." Revelation begins with God. He is the source of all truth. The human mind may labor to unlock hidden verities, but truth is a gift from the One who alone is omniscient, who knows the end from the beginning. We mortals do not create truth; we receive it. We may, and we should, study and apply ourselves to research. God never blesses a lazy mind; revelation comes only to

those who seek it. But while we study we must continually remember that truth is not a *product* of study; it is a *reward* of it. Truth is objective, not subjective. It is outside of man, not inside of him. And human cunning can never pull back the veil to ultimate truth.

This is humiliating to the ego. We like to be smart. We prefer to believe that the clever idea was our own. Our pride gloats over the thesis that we have an inventive brain. And any inference that we are not a fountain of original ideas is offensive. We like to be smart, to be known as a "thinker."

The apostle Paul blasted all such egocentrism with these piercing questions, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (I Corinthians 4:7).

Wisdom begins when we recognize that all wisdom comes from God. Human tragedy begins with two words: "I thought." Naaman almost lost his healing because of them (II Kings 5:11). When Solomon wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10), he was not advocating a phobia, but was rather proclaiming man's utter dependence upon the Almighty for truth. If we do not know the Origin of truth, we will never know what truth really is. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

Thus, the *principle* of this phrase, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto

him" is applicable today and is vital to all Christians' growth. When philosophy and psychology usurp the role of divine revelation in man's quest for truth, the end result is a hopeless floundering in the quagmire of confusion, frustration, and doubt. That man who was first across the finish line in a long distance race in recent Olympic games in Europe did not win; he had not started at the starting line! And neither will we win in our search for those truths which will lead us safely into the world to come if we do not start at this starting line: All truth originates in the mind of God, and is given to man only by revelation.

2. *The finished fact.*

Principles are deduced from facts. The principle that all truth originates in the mind of God and is given to man only by revelation is an inevitable and proper conclusion from the fact stated in Revelation 1:1—"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him." The thought is as staggering as is the very idea of the one, true, transcendent, and eternal God: *God revealed to Jesus that He, Jesus, is the Christ!*

The pronoun "*him*" in 1:1 can refer to none other than our Lord. The latter part of the verse will explain how the communication was further conveyed to "his servant John." Any attempt to prove that the revelation was given from God to any other than Jesus is a violation of Biblical interpretation. We are not at liberty to rearrange

Scripture to make it conform to our doctrines. God gave the revelation to Jesus, and Jesus transmitted that revelation to man. We learn by revelation, but those revelations which we receive come from Jesus. And those truths which our Lord reveals to us are those He has received from the Father. You can't bypass Jesus in your quest for truth.

The verb "gave" is in the past tense in the Greek as it is in the English. It denotes a point in time past when this event was accomplished. This is not predictive; it is past. The past always lays the foundation for the future. But we must be consistent with language, for it is our only way of communicating truth. Simon Peter was aware of this when he asked Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Eternal life is communicated through words, whether written or spoken. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). And if we twist the "words" of Scripture we distort the communication of truth. The verb "gave" describes a revelation that was given to Jesus *before* an angel conveyed it to the prophet on Patmos.

This raises an all-important question: *At what point in time past did God give such a revelation to Jesus?* (Bear in mind what the revelation is: it is that Jesus is the Christ.) This certainly could not have happened before the Incarnation, for at that time our Lord held His original state as a Member of the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent

Godhead. John described Him before the Incarnation, with these, some of the most transcendent words of Scripture: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-4).

It is imperative to note that our Lord bore two names while on earth. There were several titles by which He was known—such as Lord and Savior—but only two names: *Jesus Christ*. Jesus was His earthly name. Even though Gabriel declared at the annunciation that they shall "call his name JESUS" (Luke 1:31), Jesus was His earthly name. It was a common name in Israel, equivalent to the Hebrew Old Testament name "Joshua." If our Lord ever had to sign His name in any kind of legal documents, such as school, registration, or the like, He used the name Jesus. If further identification were required He probably wrote Jesus Bar Joseph. (This would have been no concession or compromise on His part. His mother had told Him of His birth. But His time had not yet come.) Through the first thirty years of His life, *all* His friends called Him Jesus. That was His name.

At age thirty, something transcendent happened to Jesus. From that time on, He was known as Jesus Christ. *Christ* is a heavenly name, equivalent to the Hebrew word Messiah, and means *the anointed One*. As Jesus, our Lord was Man. As Christ, He was God. He both was and is the glorious God-man

and thus is qualified to be the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 2:5).

The revelation that Jesus is the Christ came to Him at His water baptism! All three synoptic Gospels describe the event, but two note an important change in pronouns. John Baptist was baptizing in the river Jordan. Jesus approached and asked to be baptized, too. John appropriately protested, avowing his unworthiness to baptize the Lamb of God. But Jesus insisted, and John baptized Him. At once the Trinity was present: Jesus being baptized, the Holy Spirit descending in a bodily form upon Him, and the Father speaking from heaven.

What did the Father say? Matthew records these words: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Mark records the statement: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). And Luke agrees with Mark: "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

The statement was not made *about* Jesus; it was *to* Him. It was not for the benefit of the crowd; it was for the benefit of the Lord. Since early childhood His mother had told Him of Gabriel, the overshadowing of the Spirit, and of His virgin birth. She had explained to Him that He was in fact the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel. Yet there is not one shred of New Testament evidence that, prior to His baptism, Jesus knew any more about

His true identity than His mother taught Him. To argue that as a child He remembered being with the Father in heaven before His incarnation is mere wishful thinking—lacking both in Scripture and in sense.

At Bethlehem our Lord emptied Himself. Completely. He lived on earth as man. Disprove that statement and you have no Savior. We can only contact heaven through a High Priest who “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus never wrought one victory on earth because He was the incarnate Son of God; each was done by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwelt in Him. All His knowledge was given to Him of His Father. He cast out devils by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God raised Him from the dead.

In the wilderness Satan slyly commenced tempting our Lord as Christ: “If thou be *the Son of God*, command that these stones be made bread.” But our Savior saw the subtlety of the question, and replied, “It is written, *Man* shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:3, 4). He refused to be tempted as God, “for God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13).

At the close of our Lord’s ministry, He prayed a prayer which He could not have prayed four years earlier. “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). He remembered

the glory. He remembered eternity past. He remembered the fellowship among the Trinity when they dwelt alone—outside space and time.

But He was not born in Bethlehem with that consciousness. God gave it to Him! And the revelation could have come only at His baptism.

What a transcendent truth applicable to each of God's servants today: *Don't begin God's work without a revelation!* Jesus knew who He was, where He came from, and even a great deal about His mission. Yet He dared not make one move until God Himself spoke. Then He "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:29). Then He "went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matthew 9:35).

Thirty years must have been a long time for Jesus to wait. But He knew that the ministry without a revelation is built on head knowledge rather than on heart fire. Built on the letter rather than the Spirit, it would kill. It still will.

God gave the revelation to Jesus that He is the Christ—"which God gave unto him." That is a fact of history. It is usually overlooked, ignored, and considered relatively unimportant. But read your Bible again and see how Satan moved in on Jesus *at that point*. The next forty days of our Lord's life prove that the wicked one considered the revelation at Jordan to be the turning point in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

3. *The future previewed.*

Revelation 1:1 is not predictive. Although it portends "things which must shortly come to pass" the events of the verse itself are past. God *did* reveal to Jesus that He is the Christ. Christ *did* send a message to John by an angel announcing things to come. These are accomplished facts.

Yet the allusion in this verse to the future makes us believe that "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him" also connotes a view to 1:7, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

And especially to 19:11-16: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh

a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Someday the revelation that was given to Jesus at Jordan will be given to the whole world. It will be too late to try to change your mind then. Accept Jesus as your Christ right now!

5 WHO KNOWS THE FUTURE?

The opening verse of the Apocalypse is a volume in itself, containing six transcendent truths vital to the study of this most timely Book. In this lesson we will note the third of those six basics.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.—Revelation 1:1.

III. THE SUBJECT

“Things which must shortly come to pass.”

“But,” some might object, “does the book of Revelation have two subjects? Haven’t you already attempted to prove that the phrase ‘the Revelation of Jesus Christ’ is the subject of the book?”

Not at all. “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*” is the *title* of the book. It is the foundational premise through which “things which must shortly come to pass” are revealed. This book does not set out to reveal Jesus as the Christ; earlier books of Scripture do that very well. John’s Gospel, for example, settles the matter: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written that ye

might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30, 31). Paul, and the other writers of the epistles, drove this nail in all the way; they incontestably proved to all who have ears to hear that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ of God.

Thus, we do not read the book of Revelation to discover "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." We read it because the revelation has *already* come to us! For this very reason, unregenerate men find the Apocalypse a closed, dark, mysterious, and baffling book: They have not come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through His shed blood.

The *subject* of the book, however, is a different matter. It is "things which must shortly come to pass." It looks into the future. Beginning with the rapture of the Church in 4:1, all events of Revelation are unfulfilled. We wholeheartedly belong to what is termed the "futurist" school of interpretation of this book, categorically denying the historic view, the preterist view, and the spiritualizing view. This book is about the future. Although (as we shall later see) the first three chapters submit to the outline of 1:19—showing "the things which thou hast seen and the things which are"—the final nineteen chapters show "the things which shall be hereafter."

If you want to know what Jesus did while on earth, read the Gospels. If you want to know about the birth and growth of the early Church, read Acts.

If you want to know about the establishment of the doctrines of Christianity, read the Epistles. But if you want to know about the future, read Revelation. (It is, of course, impossible to “box in” any facet of revealed truth. Some grand prophecies can be found in the Gospels, in the Acts, and in the Epistles. But basically, if you read Revelation you are reading about the future.)

God knows the future. “Educated” man concocts all sorts of questions about divine foreknowledge. Of late, queries concerning “limited foreknowledge” are in vogue. It satisfies the human ego to put boundaries on the Almighty. And finite philosophers—whether real or pretended—never weary of attacking the transcendent truth that *God dwells outside the realms of space and time!* The God of the Bible is not only omnipresent, He inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the A and the Z. Note: we must beware lest we read, “He *was* the Alpha, and He *shall be* the Omega.” The verb is in the present tense: *is!* Think about it, but not too long—it will blow your mind. Our God is in the beginning, yet there was no beginning. (If there were a beginning to God, He would not be eternal; He would, like us, be everlasting.) And our God is in the end, and there will be no end!

So-called “thinkers” will immediately protest, “I can’t buy that! To imply that God now dwells in the past, in the present, and in the future—all at the same time—is an absolute impossibility!”

By whose standards? By ours, yes. But since when is the Almighty God to be measured by the standards of man? Isaiah wrote by divine revelation: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9). That ought to settle the matter; no believer in the Bible ought to waste his time trying to analyze the Almighty. His ways are past finding out (Romans 11:33). Decipher God, sir, and you have no God!

I am not belaboring a point when I insist that we are not ready to study Revelation until we are thoroughly convinced that God knows the future. Call it naïveté, call it blind faith, call it simplicity, call it immaturity, call it whatever you will—I will not quibble with you about it: I believe that God has absolute foreknowledge. (Besides, what do you have to gain by straining to rob the Lord of a bit of His knowledge of the future?)

The book of Revelation is about "things which *must* shortly come to pass." Now, count on it, if God said they will come to pass, they will come to pass. Wager against the Lord and you are going to lose. He is not playing games with us. He is not inspiring a mysterious book full of dark and fearsome calamities simply in order to make us more confused and fearful than ever. *He is telling it like it will be!*

You see, our heavenly Father is dealing with sin.

This planet fell beneath the curse, and although Jesus Christ shall someday reign supreme on this terra firma, “*we see not yet all things put under him*” (Hebrews 2:8). The serpent’s head was bruised at Calvary, yes, but no honest person can question the fact that the devil—though bruised—is now spreading havoc all over this sphere. The hoofprint of the wicked one is everywhere.

And God is going to defeat Satan completely. The schedule is outlined in Revelation. I am not required to understand it. The specific purpose for each event may not be clear to me, but I do know the result: *God is going to win!* Let that truth settle into your mind, sir, and your bickering about prophecy will cease.

“But,” argues someone, “I don’t understand why a sovereign God has to go through such long and gruesome details in order to defeat the devil.” Neither do I, but God is going to win!

Another contends, “If God wants to destroy Russia, why doesn’t He just do it? Why does He have to involve ten countries in a complex empire headed by the man of sin?” I don’t know the answers to your questions, but there’s one thing I do know: *God is going to win.*

Questions go on and on. “Why must the sea turn to blood? Why seven plagues—why not one or ten? Why seven? Why a mark of the beast? Why boils? Why four horsemen? What did the seven thunders say? Why four odd-looking creatures before the

throne? Why wasn't Dan listed with the 144,000? Why five months in which men can't die?" The questions never run out. Mysteries breed mysteries.

Listen carefully: God is going to win! He has given His program for victory in the book of Revelation. The fact that I may not be able to fathom the specific reason for each detail of the divine schedule should not detour my faith. I know enough about the Lord to believe that He knows best. And if He says these things *must* come to pass, I accept His judgment. Unreservedly. I may not know the reason, but if Jesus says they must happen, there is a reason. That settles it! He is going to win, and I want to be on the winning side.

"But what kind of God would allow such punishment as described in the book of Revelation?" What kind of God, do you say? The kind of God who sent His Son to die in order to save you and me from hell—that kind! If you want to know the future, go to His Book. It will show you the way to heaven, a way so plain that wayfaring men, though fools, need not err therein (Isaiah 35:8).

Since you are going to spend eternity in the future, why not follow the advice of the only One who lives there?

6 “THAT YE MAY KNOW”

The *title* of the Bible's last book is its prime premise—"The Revelation of Jesus Christ." Bypass the affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God, and every line of the Apocalypse will be the letter that kills, rather than the Spirit who gives life (II Corinthians 3:6).

The *origin* of the Revelation is in the mind of God—"which God gave unto him." Man never invented these lines. Truth emanates "from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

The *subject* of the book is "things which must shortly come to pass." God knows the future. He is not guessing about tomorrow. He knows. He lives there.

This brings us to the fourth fundamental fact stated in Revelation 1:1, and that is its

IV. PURPOSE

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.—Revelation 1:1.

The *purpose* of the Revelation is defined in these words: "to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass."

The apparent obscurity of many of the mysteries written on Patmos causes some to believe that God is comparable to a teasing father who wraps a large and expensive Christmas gift for each member of his family—in June! To aggravate the torment, he puts up the Christmas tree in the living room, puts the presents under it, and allows no one to open his present for six months. And he talks about little else but those wonderful gifts, and how happy his family will be when they open them. That father is not kind—he's sick!

Yet many have "shaken the package" of Revelation, dubbed it an insolvable mystery, and secretly suspect the Sovereign of the universe is showing a sadistic streak toward those whom He claims to love. Consciously or unconsciously, they harbor the suspicion that God is really saying, "Aha, I'm smarter than you! I know the future, and you don't! However, I'll give you a chance to figure some of it out—if you're real sharp. I'll give you some riddles, which ordinary people can't understand. But if you know Hebrew and Greek, and if you study Eastern culture and mysticism, and if you study and study and study, it just might be possible for you to slightly pry open one or two doors to the future—just a little bit, and that's all!"

Ten thousand times no! The book of Revelation is given for this one specific purpose: "to shew unto

his servants things which must shortly come to pass." Deny that, and you deny all Scripture. This is a book of revelation, not a book of hidden mystery. It does not portend undiscoverable calamity; it announces definite doom, and extends the arm of deliverance from wrath to come. It is a shout of victory, not a howl of hopelessness.

If you have read the Apocalypse and have come to the conclusion that it is a stone wall of irrelevance, there is one of two problems: either you are not in reality a "servant" of Jesus Christ, or you have not discovered that spiritual things are only spiritually discerned. This book does not submit itself to the test tubes of finite deduction.

Now, inasmuch as the intent of the book is to "shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass," we can immediately see both the prerequisite and the purpose of this divine plan of revelation of the future.

1. *The prerequisite.*

The future is revealed only to "his servants." The Scripture nowhere implies that all its precepts are to be understood by "whosoever will" read them. In fact, Jesus prayed on one occasion, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matthew 11:25).

It is as true today as it was in Paul's day: "The world by wisdom knew not God" (I Corinthians 1:21). All Scripture, including the Revelation,

is divinely inspired, and “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians 2:14).

Carnal men bicker over the Revelation; spiritual men do not. Here is a trustworthy barometer: if you can honestly and prayerfully read the book of Revelation without receiving any transcendent disclosures about your future and glorious hope in Christ, you—though a son—have not also accepted your true position as a servant. For these “things to come” are revealed only “to his servants.”

A servant is a slave. But that statement does not tell the whole story of the Christian’s relation to his Lord. A slave may hold his position in absolute rebellion, hating his master, and coveting only his freedom. He may despise the whole system, calling it unfair and cruel. He may even secretly work against his master while maintaining the position of a slave.

There is, however, an Old Testament passage which beautifully describes the loving position of a New Testament slave in Christ. It is Exodus 21:1-6. The faithful servant loves his master so much that he is unwilling to leave. His ear is bored through with an aul, and he becomes a slave forever. The ideas of compulsion and drudgery are gone; the man is a slave because of love.

Only such slaves have met the prerequisites for

the understanding of Revelation. All others want to quibble; they are inoculated with ideas of an unfair God. All divine pronouncements are met with one question, "Why?"

If you are not a love-slave of Jesus, leave the Apocalypse alone. It was not written to you. And brilliant though you may be, you will not be able to comprehend one syllable.

2. *The purpose.*

God wants His servants to know the things that will come to pass because He does not want His children to be walking into the dark. One word is the clue: "shortly." The Greek expression is *en tachei*, and has two important meanings.

a. *En tachei* connotes the idea of "imminence"—something that is going to happen right away. There are those who have argued against the validity of this entire book because of such statements as this. "How," they say, "could this be a revelation of something that must shortly come to pass? Almost 2,000 years have transpired and it hasn't been fulfilled!" In answer, turn to Romans 16:20. The promise to the church is, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." *En tachei*. That statement was written nearly two millennia ago, and Satan has not yet been bruised under the feet of the redeemed. God does not deal with time as we deal with time. He is not in a hurry. A millennium or two is as nothing with Him.

God wants His Church ever to live in anticipation

of His imminent return. Had the Lord announced that His people could rest assured that these judgments would not begin for two thousand years, the Church would have died out soon after it was born. The principle remains the same today: Beware of any system of religion which delays the coming of the Lord. We *must* live in anticipation of the imminent “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

b. *En tachei* also connotes the idea of rapidity of execution once action begins. Once the “end” starts, one event will follow immediately upon the heels of the other, and some of them will even overlap the other. The plan is not ambiguous, and will not be dependent on human reactions. Once the Church is gone, the divine schedule for redeeming a fallen planet will be set into effect. The program has no flaw, and will be carried out rapidly.

Only one thing keeps the wheels of the endtime from being set in motion. The “salt” is still in the “earth”—the “light” is still in the “world” (Matthew 5:13, 14). When the salt is gone, the meat will spoil. When the light leaves, darkness prevails. When the trumpet sounds and the one who “hinders” (II Thessalonians 2:7, 8), which is the Church, is taken out of this world, “that Wicked” shall be revealed.

If John on Patmos could write about “things which must shortly come to pass,” and they haven’t happened yet, how near are we now to the coming of the Lord? Jesus said, “And when these things

begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). The warning is given in order that we may get ready. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord” (Luke 12:35, 36). That is what the book of Revelation is all about.

7 BEAUTIFUL FEET

We might as well get used to the idea in the very first verse, for this principle will confront us in every paragraph of the Apocalypse: God's revelations to man are believable but transcendent. Simple faith in Jesus attests to their veracity, yet the most brilliant philosopher among men cannot unravel their mystery. The mere fact that spiritual truth "passeth knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19) does not cause us to discard it; in fact, its very excellence endears it to the heart of all who have caught a vision of Jesus as the Christ. Once a man can behold the bleeding and dying Man from Nazareth as the mighty God and Savior of the world, he is prepared to walk on higher ground than any mortal mind can comprehend.

Only on this premise of transcendency can we dare to meditate now on the fifth fundamental fact of the opening verse of Revelation.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.—Revelation 1:1.

V. THE MANNER OF COMMUNICATION

"And he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant."

Dormant truth may be full of inherent dynamic, but until it is communicated to a man it—for all practical purposes—does not, for him, exist. The telegram may contain a true and important message, but it has no effect on the life of the one for whom it was intended until he receives it. A man may "sleep like a baby," unaware of the fact that a letter is in his post office box—a letter which will shatter his life. But until he receives it, it is for him nonexistent.

In like manner, divine truth must be communicated to man. Else what is its purpose? "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:13-15). These words of the apostle view the whole scope of the necessity of communicating the gospel message, and of the divine plan for doing so. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Little wonder, then, that Paul's questions turned

to a shout of triumph as he quoted the anointed lines of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah: “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (1) Those who *call* on the Lord will be saved. (2) A man must *believe* in the Lord before he can genuinely call upon Him. (3) A man must *hear* about the Lord before he can believe upon Him. (4) God has elected to use preachers to *communicate* the good news of Jesus to a lost world. (5) Those preachers—or messengers—enjoy the highest of all callings: They have been “*sent*.” The vocation was not of their own choosing. God specifically calls each messenger He uses.

The logic is plain and simple. All five premises are in order. But why the conclusion, God’s messengers have beautiful feet? John knew the answer; for as the Apocalypse nears its closing paragraphs the divine messenger verifies, “These are the true sayings of God.” And John adds, “And I fell at his feet to worship him” (19:9, 10). The prophet on Patmos was so grateful for the obedient servant who delivered the divine message to him that he fell at his feet!

Every individual who has genuinely responded to the gospel message knows the feeling; he is eternally beholden to the feet that brought him the good news of salvation. Although he is not permitted to worship the earthly bearer of good tidings—as John was forbidden in Revelation 19:10 to worship God’s messenger—the feeling of gratefulness abides. (Watch

out for the man whose "spirituality" becomes so superior that he refuses to honor the man who introduced him to Jesus!)

The word "angel" in Revelation 1:1 can only be appreciated if understood. There *are* angelic beings—seraphim, cherubim, and other orders of spirit-beings who belong to another order than ours. Their ministry is seen throughout Scripture, and is very real and effective even in our day. Interesting and informative books have been written about the ministries and orders of those celestial beings who, created by God before the foundation of the world, continually serve the Lord. Jacob saw them ascending and descending between heaven and earth. Isaiah saw them worshiping before the throne of God. To deny their existence is to deny God's Word. Though unseen by us, their faithful service is vital to our spiritual survival.

To suppose, however, that the word "angel" in Scripture always refers to those spirit-beings is to mistake the language of the Bible. In the second and third chapters of Revelation, for instance, the word "angel" implies "pastor." Literally understood, "angel" means "messenger." And God uses messengers of all orders.

The "angel" of Revelation 1:1 was not a "spirit-being." He was not of the order that Jacob saw. The proof is in 19:10 (and most Bible scholars agree that the "angel" of 1:1, who delivered the divine message to John, is the same one who was continuing to deliver that message in 19:10). After

hearing and seeing so much through the ministry of God's selected "angel," John said, "And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." It requires very little consideration to know that if this messenger were "of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus" he must be a member of Adam's race.

This raises what some believe to be pertinent questions. What is the identity of this messenger of Revelation 1:1? What is his name? Do departed saints have assignments to deliver divine directives to God's servants on earth today?

It is my opinion, however, that all such queries merely beg the question. Had God wanted us to know the identity of this selected messenger, He would have told us. Inasmuch as the Scripture is silent in regard to his identity, can't we just let it go at that? Are not many of our questions only idle curiosity—proving nothing at all?

Perhaps there are some important reasons for this omission of a name. Could it be that God wants us to know that, although He chooses men to be the evangelists of His grace, their names are not meant for the headlines? Could it also be that God wants us to know that behind every renowned John there is a nameless messenger without whose faithfulness the seer on Patmos could never have written the triumphant Apocalypse of the Bible? And could it

also be that God wants to teach us that no man is so great, so holy, so near to Jesus but that he needs to sit at the feet of the humble servant of God whose name may not even be known until the ages to come?

I am encouraged, not discouraged, by the omission of the name of God's messenger who communicated some of the grandest revelations of Scripture to the prophet on Patmos. The world knows John's name; God knows the name of the messenger behind John. Isn't it enough to be known in heaven?

The world needs some men like John—some men out in front. Without them a lost planet will never hear the message of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Their personality, their power with the pen, their eloquence, their talents, their very charisma—all these can be effective and effectual tools in turning men from darkness to light. Let's face it, separate John from the Apocalypse and you are left with a bare and unattractive skeleton.

But the world is also in dire need of some dedicated saints, like the messenger of Revelation 1:1, whose names may never be known. Their ministry is at the altar of God. Their work is behind closed doors, in the closet of prayer. Their power is in their intercession. They fast, but the world never knows about it. They weep, yet they write no books on the ministry of tears. They suffer the burden of a broken heart, yet their faces never betray the anguish of their souls.

And without them there would be no John the Revelators!

Two things are outstanding about God's selected messengers. They are sent, and they are signs.

1. *They are sent.* "He *sent* and signified it by his angel." No servant of the Lord can accomplish anything for his Master until he is sent. We are not at liberty to move at our own discretion, to choose our own course of action, to map out our own itinerary. We must be sent. God knows what we can do best in His service; we only know what we would *like* best to do. And as long as we make the decisions, we will be a discredit to the Kingdom. We must be sent.

2. *They are signs.* "He sent and *signified* it by his angel." God's messengers not only have a message to deliver; we have a life to live. We must be signs. The apostle Paul recognized this when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (II Corinthians 3:2).

If we preach a God of love, men must see the signs of love in our lives. If we preach forgiveness, the signs of forgiveness must be apparent in our day-by-day dealings with men. If we proclaim a holy God and fail to show signs of holiness, our message will be as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. If we are false signs of the gospel we proclaim, we are in fact agents of Satan rather than servants of Christ.

Finally, note: God communicates His message through His servants. Any angel in heaven would love to teach your Sunday school class, but that assignment is yours. God speaks through men.

Saul of Tarsus learned this on the Damascus road. Jesus was talking to Saul, and thus could easily have

given him instructions for his new life. But, no. The word is, "Arise, and go into the city, and *it shall be told thee* what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). Even to Saul, the message will be sent through a servant. To John on Patmos, the message was sent through a servant.

Today, God has a message for you. If you will hear it, it will come through one of His servants. And when you hear it you will love the dedication of that servant of the Lord, and will—in spirit, at least—fall at his feet, saying, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

8 GOD'S AMANUENSIS

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.—Revelation 1:1.

The order of the six fundamental premises of the Apocalypse is beautifully and logically outlined in its first verse. (1) It is predicated on the revelation that Jesus of Nazareth is in fact the Christ of God. (2) It originated in the mind of God, and thus cannot be considered as one of man's "cunningly devised fables." (3) It is about things which must shortly come to pass. (4) It is not a secret, but is revealed to the servants of the Lord. And (5) Jesus sent it by a messenger. This brings us to the sixth general principle of this verse:

VI. THE WRITER

"His servant John."

It is imperative to note that John is not the author of the book of Revelation. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Timothy 3:16). "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: holy men of God spake as they were moved by the

Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21). God wrote Revelation. The Author of this mighty book is not any mortal man who is subject to error.

Much discord has evolved in the study of Scripture simply because students of God's Word have presumed that the human penmen who first put these lines into some form of writing have either intentionally or unintentionally been the scribes of some of their own opinions. For example, countless commentators have excused Paul's writings concerning marriage by explaining that the apostle was either a bachelor or had had an unfortunate marriage himself. Thus they feel at liberty to discard any of Paul's instructions relative to the man-woman relationship that are not to their particular liking. One comment seems to settle it all: "Oh, you can't blame Paul for saying what he did about marriage, but we must understand what he had been through. Surely his own troubles colored his thinking."

Start that line of reasoning, sir, and you destroy the very foundation of the entire Scriptures. While we would not, in all instances, argue that God dictated every line of the Bible in a word-by-word dictation, we uncompromisingly insist that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God." No human penman was permitted to insert a few of his own ideas. Nor was he allowed to reword the divine directive in such a way as to distort its meaning.

This is probably neither the time nor the place to enter into the complicated discussions about plenary and verbal inspiration. Such considerations are

indeed important and need to be studied diligently and prayerfully. Suffice it to say at this time that we accept the Scriptures as inspired of God, and we refuse to believe that any human writer of these sacred lines distorted the message which he was instructed to write.

Those who are able to read the Scriptures in their original languages would be the first to tell us that each writer had his own style, and that each had his own particular command of the language in which he wrote. A man's individual education may determine the syntax of his sentence, but the divine message is not dependent upon the degree of the penman's learning. The truth of the gospel is the same, whether conveyed in monosyllables or multipolysyllables. Beware of confusing truth with finesse.

God Himself has never been the Scribe of any book of the Bible; that is, His own hand has written no books. He has always written through an amanuensis. The word *amanuensis* literally means "a slave with secretarial duties." It is used of "one employed to write from dictation or to copy manuscript." Thus we read, "He sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record. . . ."

Many, if not most, of Paul's letters were penned by an amanuensis. He dictated them, but others pushed the pencil. Note, for example, Paul's epistle to the Romans. It begins with his personal salutation and authentication: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of

God. . . . To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:1, 7). The letter was Paul's. Yet on the last page of that important document we read, "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord" (Romans 16:22). The letter was from Paul, and Tertius was the writer—the amanuensis.

One notable exception was the apostle's letter to the Galatians. No amanuensis was available, so Paul wrote it himself. "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand" (Galatians 6:11). And he also added his personal postscript to his first letter to the Corinthian church: "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand" (I Corinthians 16:21). But for the most part, Paul himself did little writing, although thirteen New Testament books call him their author. (Actually, however, in Paul's case, there was a double amanuensis. The Holy Spirit was the Author of Paul's letters. The apostle received the message from God, and dictated it to a scribe.)

Scriptural history records only three writings of God Himself. On Mount Sinai, He wrote the ten commandments on tables of stone. On the wall of Belshazzar's palace, He wrote an anathema upon that presumptuous and wicked king and upon his kingdom. And when a woman taken in adultery was brought to Jesus, He wrote in the dust with His finger.

God's first writing was broken while it was being

written. God's second writing either vanished after it was read or perished with the walls on which it was written. God's third writing was destroyed by the winds and by the feet of men.

He doesn't write anymore. Not with His own finger. If He were to write again on tables of stone, disobedient men would make a shrine of the stones. If He were to write words of judgment on the walls of the wicked, there would be trembling but no repentance. If He were to write on the dust, guilty men would read His manuscript and walk away, leaving the divine message to the elements and to the trampling feet of careless men.

No, the grandest of all messages must be penned by an amanuensis. God, in a wisdom beyond mortal comprehension, has elected to use mankind to win mankind. There may be exceptions, but they are indeed exceptions. Saul of Tarsus may hear a voice from heaven in a way that none of us will ever hear, but even that great apostle will hear the Lord say, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). *It shall be told thee what thou must do!* Even Paul would hear the divine instructions from the lips of another man!

John is involved in the book of Revelation. His pen recorded that grand and mysterious Apocalypse. He wrote what he saw and heard. He described experiences that he had. He used his utmost command of the Greek language to accurately translate the

indescribable into the understandable. He thought in Hebrew, spoke Aramaic, and wrote in Greek. He had a long background of multicultural. His conditions for writing were adverse.

But John was God's amanuensis. John never wrote Revelation—he only pushed the pencil. This book bears, in a way unsurpassed in Scripture, the divine signature. Read verse eight of its opening chapter: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." This is God's book, even though its lines were written by a man.

Oh, how important this truth is! How tempted we are to judge the message even today by critically examining the messenger. We may, in these studies, look more closely at the man called John. But the most important thing about him is seen in the first verse: he is God's amanuensis. He is the slave who did God's writing.

I need know nothing about Tertius in order to study the grand doctrines of the book of Romans. Tertius was only the scribe. I must look beyond the man who pushed the pencil. Note, for example, Isaiah 45:1, where the wicked king Cyrus was called the Lord's "anointed." The paradox is beautiful. Even a wicked king would do God's work. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Psalm 76:10). Our sovereign God can use anyone He chooses.

I'm glad He chose John to pen the Apocalypse. But I must accept this as God's book, not John's. The message is divine.

(None of these arguments should be used as an excuse for carelessness in Christian living. We may not, we must not, assume that if we deliver a correct message we can live any way we want to. Ours must not be the attitude: "Do as I say, not as I do!" God selects His amanuenses carefully. I have been stating that we, as listeners, must hear the message. The rich young ruler preached a message which is needed by all mankind, yet who would elect to walk in his footsteps? He walked away from Christ!

Be God's true amanuensis. Live, as John, close to the Lord. Learn to hear His voice. And pass it on! We are not called to be reservoirs but channels. The world needs a message from God, but wicked men cannot hear His gospel—unless they hear it through you.

Suppose John, like Judas, had betrayed the Lord. There would still have been a book of Revelation. But John wouldn't have written it—and I wonder if it would have been quite so transcendent. (You see, not every apostle was such a mystic as this apostle "whom Jesus loved.") But even though someone else would have been the scribe, John would have missed the opportunity to tell the world about "things which must shortly come to pass."

If you refuse to be God's amanuensis, He will select another. But no one can write just like you—and God selected you. The message of the Gospel will go out. The question is: Will you be involved in winning a lost world to Jesus?

9 THE BIG KISS

Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Revelation 1:2.

In one of the smaller galaxies of the universe, near to one of the smaller stars in that galaxy, on one of the smaller planets under the influence of that small star, walks a minute creature called man. When we attempt to fathom the concept that there is no point in the universe any nearer the center of the universe than any other point in the universe, it nearly blows our minds! And when we are confronted with the innate problem of contacting the omnipresent God, we are filled with frustration.

And contact Him we must! Our finiteness cannot deter us, for we have the inborn consciousness that we are made for another world. We are citizens of eternity. We are citizens of the universe. We know that when this house of clay, which we call our body, lies still in death, we will not be in it. There is a mysterious thing called immortality—a continuation of living after this mortal life is over. And we cannot be satisfied until we get some authentic facts about it.

Every religion on earth believes in immortality. The gamut of man's concepts about it covers the spectrum from that of being immortal through good deeds to the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. Convince a man's head that life ends at the grave and he will end it! (I say, "convince a man's head," for you cannot convince a man's heart that life ends at the grave. His heart knows better.)

The problem becomes a dilemma. How can the finite get in touch with the infinite? How can the seen communicate with the unseen? How can the temporal touch the eternal? How can the corruptible converse with the incorruptible? How can the mortal lay hold on the immortal?

The answer is very simple: We can't! The unseen God is far too high and holy for weak, puny, wicked man ever to make an appointment with Him. Such a face-to-face confrontation is absolutely out of the question. All arguments are against us. We can never build a tower that will reach up to heaven.

Those things which are impossible with man, however, are possible with God. Man could not find a way to reach up to Deity, but divine love found a way to reach down to man. Working within the absolute limits of love and justice, God found a way whereby mortal man may hold beautiful fellowship with the transcendent Sovereign of the universe. Furthermore, through this glorious plan, we may actually call the Almighty God our "Father."

John outlined the procedure whereby man may meet God in Revelation 1:2. The outline is simple,

yet profound. It is (1) God's word, (2) Jesus' testimony, and (3) man's vision.

1. *God's word.*

The action begins in heaven, not on earth. "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (I John 4:10). The lost sheep never went seeking a shepherd; the shepherd went after the sheep.

All hope of mankind lies in God's hands. We can't climb up to Him, so if He doesn't devise a way to reach down to us we are lost. If we are to be saved, He must save us. It would be easier for a man to lift himself up into the air by pulling on his own bootstraps than to, on his own initiative, make contact with God.

The very first word of redemption is God's word. He made the move. He could have ignored us, inasmuch as we had gone away from Him; He never went away from us. But God is love. And His love is higher, holier, nobler than any we have ever known. Rather than leave us to our own deserved fate, He set out to establish a perfect program which could bring a holy God and an unholy man together.

It wasn't easy—not even for God. He has limits within which He must work: the limits of love and justice. He cannot be either unkind or unfair. If He were so loving as to wink at sin and excuse it, He would not be just. If He were arbitrarily

to damn all wicked men into the lake of fire without any means of hope, there would be a question about His kindness.

2. Jesus' testimony.

Infinite wisdom found a way. One Member of the triune God emptied Himself of the form of God, and took upon Himself the form of sinful man. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9). The guiltless became guilty, though He Himself had done no wrong. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin: that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus was born of a virgin. A baby's body comes from its mother but its blood comes from its father. Being born of woman, Jesus had an earthly body. But having no earthly father, His blood was not derived from Adam. The gap had been bridged. God and man met in Jesus Christ. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10).

The curse that was placed on Adam's race was the curse of death. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), so all must die. But Jesus never sinned, therefore He ought not to have died. But He did!

How is it possible that Jesus could die? He had done no wrong. There was in Him nothing worthy of death. Pilate's examination of the Lord compelled

him to confess again and again, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). Jesus was guiltless. Yet he died. How?

"Christ died for our sins" (I Corinthians 15:3). "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (I Peter 3:18). Our guilt was placed upon Him. He died in our stead. He became our Substitute in order that we might live.

The words of the Old Testament prophet were fulfilled in Jesus Christ: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Our sins nailed Jesus to the cross. Our iniquities caused sinless blood to be spilled. Our transgressions caused the physical body of our Lord to be so mangled that He no longer resembled a man (Isaiah 52:14). He died for us—that we might live. For, you see, He died willingly. He could have called ten thousand angels, and could have escaped the agonies of Golgotha. The nails never held Him to the tree. His love for you and me kept Him there.

The testimony of Jesus is this: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,

but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17).

3. *Man’s vision.*

The story is not fully told, however, even at Calvary. God, in transcendent love, found a way to bring God and man together in beautiful love and fellowship. Jesus carried out that plan, beginning at Bethlehem and evident majestically at the Cross.

But, mister, if you don’t see it, it will do you no good. Even the Almighty God cannot save you against your will.

You see, we were involved in the crucifixion of Jesus. Blame the Jews for it, and we will be lost forever. We have got to say, “He loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). It’s got to be more than a fact of history. Each of us must be able to stand before the Cross and say, “It’s my fault. I crucified Jesus. He died for me.” Anything less than that is mere intellectual assent to a fact of history, and will not make us right with God.

The big kiss is at the Cross. The impassable gulf is bridged. By confession of personal sin, by admission of inability to climb up to God through our own ingenuity, by the vision that Christ died in order that we might live, and by surrendering our life to the glorious God-Man Jesus Christ, the fear of the future disappears. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

And “There is therefore now no condemnation to

them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

God's work is done: He devised the plan. Christ's work is done: He carried out the divine plan. Only your assignment remains: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

Then it will happen in your life; "righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10), and you will be caught in the smack!

10 TO BE HAPPY, DO THESE THINGS

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.—Revelation 1:3.

Everybody wants to be happy. We were made that way. One of the earliest traits of childhood is the same as one of the last characteristics of old age—that innate quest for happiness. Ten thousand failures to discover the magic formula for lasting happiness does not dull a man's appetite for it. And only on the rarest of occasions does his repeated failure lead to total despair. The suicide is the exception, not the rule; and besides, who is to say that the suicide is inevitably running from failure? A distorted mind may actually be seeking happiness through that fatal route.

It is normal to want to be happy. Both Old and New Testaments recognize this. The Psalms, which more than any other book of Old Testament Scripture bares the soul of man, begins with this recognition. Its opening lines are "Blessed is the man that" All the Psalms are in reality predicated on man's quest for happiness. Read them again under this

premise, and your soul will be indeed blessed.

We would not, however, argue that the *order* in which the Psalms are listed in Scripture is divinely inspired, so it may be that the fact that the Psalm about happiness being listed first is purely coincidental. But turn to the New Testament. The order here is not coincidental; it is as factual as anything in the Bible. When Jesus began His great sermon on the mount, whether you are reading Matthew 5 or Luke 6, He began with the beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. . . . Blessed are they that mourn. . . . Blessed are the meek. . . . Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness. . . . Blessed are the merciful. . . . Blessed are the pure in heart. . . . Blessed are the peace-makers. . . . Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matthew 5:3-10). *Blessed* means *happy*.

Our Lord would not begin to lay the foundational truths upon which His Church would be built without first clearly and incontestibly establishing the fact that those principles will produce true and lasting happiness. Jesus did not come to deter man's quest for happiness; He came to show the way!

And it is, I believe, very significant that the great apocalyptic book of New Testament Scripture will not complete one paragraph without giving assurance that this is a book which will produce true happiness. This promise must be quite a shock to superficial students of the Word. Far too many are

convinced that the Revelation is a book of gloom and doom, that it only portends wrath, terror, and awful judgment. The very idea that this book can bring happiness to its followers is, to their thinking, almost ludicrous and absolutely preposterous.

One of the reasons for believing that Revelation is anything but a volume to give happiness is the failure to understand the promise of its third verse. It is commonly assumed that a threefold blessing is outlined here: one for the reader, one for the hearer, and one for all who "keep those things which are written therein."

So reason has decreed: first things first. First read the book, for a blessing is promised to "he that readeth." Everybody wants to be happy, and here is an apparent divine guarantee that all who read this book will be happy. The result of such a mistaken assumption has been near tragic. Reading the Apocalypse has resulted in frustration, confusion, fear, and consternation. Some of its pages cause the reader to shudder. And it is not at all unusual for the first-time reader of Revelation to have nightmares about it.

"This is happiness?" men wonder. "What sort of perverted mind could read about such awful portending judgment and be happy? It's like living in constant dread of being run over by a freight train! If that's happiness, leave me to my misery!" They close the book, dubbing it a mystery to be pored over by those morbid souls who have nothing better to do than to anticipate catastrophe.

The tragedy of their failure to discover happiness, however, is a simple result of a failure to read the promise. There are not three blessings offered in verse three; there is *one blessing*, but *three conditions* for receiving it! The happy man—the genuinely happy man—is the one who reads, hears, and keeps the prophecy of this book. All three conditions are required. And without them, it is impossible to face the future with the calm confidence which produces the happiness that is real.

You see, there are two kinds of happiness. This distinction may seem superficial, to be sure, but it exists nonetheless. There is a happiness of the now, and there is a happiness when facing the future—and only the latter is of true value. Men may enjoy a momentary hilarity, but if the sudden possibility of stepping into the world to come erupts the serenity of their souls, we have cause to wonder if their happiness was genuine.

Revelation offers real happiness. It solves all the riddles of the apparent sovereignty of wickedness in the world today. It assures the believer that God is on the throne and that someday the victorious proclamation will be made that “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). Reading, hearing, and keeping the prophecies of this book deliver from all dread of tomorrow.

1. *You must read it.*

Read it and read it and read it. There is no

assurance that it will be easy to read. It is difficult. Every time you read it you will encounter fresh problems. Satan will taunt you with new fears. But remember: Your loving heavenly Father wrote this book, your Savior signed it, and the Holy Spirit has some things to teach you through its pages. The grandest pearls of Scripture are not lying on the surface. You must dig for them.

Never let one week go by without reading this book through. It's that important! If you don't read Revelation, you'll be horrified by what you read in the newspaper. This book is the key to your future. Don't worry about understanding it—read it.

2. You must hear it.

A big mistake has been made at this point. It has been naturally assumed that the reference is to audio—to the listening of the public reading of the Apocalypse. And as a result, some have even bought tapes so they could “hear” a man read the book of Revelation. (Now it's good to own such a tape, and to listen to it often; but to listen to the reading of this book does not mean that you hear it. When you listen to a tape, you are reading the book.)

The admonition is given seven times in the second and third chapters of Revelation: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” The reference, of course, is not to physical ears, nor is it to the reception of sound waves which men call hearing. The deaf can hear this message. Hearing is a matter of the soul. You can “hear” God's message while silently reading His book.

This is the purpose of perpetual reading. You are not trying to memorize. You are trying to hear. The Holy Spirit is saying, "There's a message for you in this book. It's a message of hope, of victory, and of glory. It's a message that will stabilize your faith and give you confidence in the storm. It's a message that will dry your tears of loneliness, and will lead you from the brink of despair. But you must keep reading and keep listening."

And I can promise you—I speak from quite a few years of personal experience—that every time you read the Revelation you will hear a glorious message that you never heard before. Every time! Passages that once were dark, mysterious, and ominous will begin to break open like the hard kernel of a walnut, revealing precious seed.

3. You must keep it.

Reading and hearing alone will condemn you. The perpetual perusing of these precious pages will permit you to hear the voice of God. You will hear Him thundering judgment on the wicked. You will hear Him instructing His angels to pour unmitigated wrath upon the ungodly. You will hear Him casting all unbelievers into the lake of fire.

Keep reading the book, and you'll begin to get its message. You will not long wonder what God is trying to say. And the dictum from the throne will be terrifying to any mere human heart.

But there's another message in Revelation, and it is simply this: Get on God's side! Keep the sayings of this book. It does not end in wrath. Its closing

pages are about the new Jerusalem. After all the condemnation and the wrath on rebellious men, there is a vision of the glories to come where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

The Apocalypse closes with a transcendent prayer, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). And its very last line is its climax, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Revelation 22:21).

Yes, there's wrath in this book, but not for those who keep its prophecies. Yes, there's judgment in this book, but not for those who keep its prophecies. All the terror, condemnation, and horror of Revelation are upon the wicked. And while we, like our Lord, will not for one second rejoice in the death of those that die, we will, by God's grace, determine to "keep those things which are written therein." This book will both give us personal hope and motivate us to unprecedented service for the Lord. Keeping ourselves in the love of God, we will obey the great commission, for if Revelation teaches anything at all it teaches that the night is coming when no man can work.

We keep the sayings of the book when we get busy working for Jesus. And, as only those who have such a vision can understand, we are the happiest people on earth—for we have hope.

11 GOD'S CLOCK

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.—Revelation 1:3.

Every student of the prophetic Word is sooner or later faced with the temptation of setting a date—at least a general date—for the coming of the Lord. The temptation is unavoidable and is almost excusable, for any diligent and dedicated study of God's dealings with Adam's race uncovers the fact that the Almighty works on schedule. And unless a man can convince himself that the Lord has suddenly made a complete about-face—that the One who has so strictly adhered to a predestined plan has abruptly abandoned His manner of working—that man will inevitably begin to, at least mentally, deal with dates. Whether or not he ever verbalizes his opinions or puts them on paper, he will see what appear to be the beginnings of the fulfillment of prophecies, and will ask himself the question, "Is this what the prophet was talking about? Is this the beginning of the end?"

And he should not be condemned for his honest

observations. He should, rather, be commended and his reckonings should be taken seriously, as long as he does not break either of the two rules of prophetic development: (1) We must not set a *date* for the coming of the Lord, and (2) we must not *delay* His coming. When a proclaimer of prophecy breaks either of these principles, find yourself a new teacher; that man has usurped an authority beyond the bounds of Scripture.

There are two things about the Lord's return which we would all like to know, and the Bible has not given the answer to either query: *one*, when is Jesus coming for His Church? and *two*, just exactly how holy do we have to live in order to go in the rapture? The second question is not answered in Scripture in order that we may never slack up in our endeavor to draw near to our Savior. We can never come to the place where we can say, "I've made it now. I've done everything I'm supposed to do for the Lord. All I have to do now is to sit back and wait." We are to "occupy" until He comes. And although we can rejoice at any moment in the confidence that we are ready to be "caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air" (I Thessalonians 4:17), we also confess that if He were to tarry a little while we want to become more like Him. Today's experience may make us ready for today's rapture, but our present state of growth and development in the Lord will not suffice for a rapture one year hence. That year must be filled with spiritual progress.

The question about readiness always circles back to

the question about time: "When is Jesus coming for His Church?" (We will not, at this time, deal with the debates between pre-tribulationism, mid-tribulationism, and post-tribulationism. We will deal with these arguments later. Suffice it to say at this time, I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture for this reason, if none other: Each of the other theories breaks what I believe to be the two basic rules of prophetic fulfillment: they set a date for the coming of the Lord, and in so doing they delay His coming.) We are now simply dealing with the subject of God's clock. When the writer of the Revelation wrote by divine inspiration, "The time is at hand," what did he mean?

Nearly two thousand years have gone by since these lines were penned. Critics of those of us who believe in an imminent rapture have pounced on this phrase, apparently forgetting that the Holy Ghost wrote it. Rather than ask what it means, they have been cruelly vociferous and almost unchristian in their using God's Word as a whip against anyone who is obeying the scriptural admonition to look for the coming of the Lord.

Typical of their onslaughts is a chapter in a recent book on prophecy, in which the writer instructs saints to get ready for severe persecution. "Then," he writes, "if there is a pre-tribulation rapture, you will be pleasantly surprised! Otherwise, if you wait for the pre-tribulation rapture, lying comfortably in your spiritual hammock, allowing your soul muscles to get flabby, and there, in fact, is not pre-trib rapture, then you will not be ready in the inner self

to withstand the enemy's onslaughts in the time of trial."

Such juvenile logic hardly deserves an answer, for it is born entirely of ignorance. Any man who believes that those who look for an imminent rapture are "lying comfortably in spiritual hammocks allowing their soul muscles to get flabby" simply could not be more dense concerning the facts. Nobody is working so hard for Jesus as the ones who really believe time is running out. And one man, who opposes pre-tribulationism vehemently and has even written an entire book against it, told me personally that he is buying some land in Alaska and is storing up enough food to "ride out" the tribulation! What dedication!

The phrase in Revelation 1:3 deserves close attention. "For the time is at hand." Inasmuch as nearly two millennia have passed without the fulfillment of these prophecies, there is obviously more to this phrase than meets the eye. And there is. Seen correctly, this phrase—as much as any single phrase of Scripture—teaches the imminent return of the Lord.

The New Testament, you know, was written—and was divinely inspired—in Greek, not in English. And there are times when we need to get a lexicon and do some studying. (In the case of such phrases as this, such a study is imperative, for the obvious answer is impossible.)

Two Greek words solve the mystery; they cause God's children to look up, and lift up our heads, for

our redemption is indeed drawing nigh (Luke 21:28). They are the words *kairos* and *eggus*. *Kairos* is here translated *time*, and *eggus* is here translated *at hand*. As we understand a little about the New Testament usage of each word, we understand the meaning of this phrase written on Patmos so long ago: "The time is at hand." (Please don't mistake my intent. You don't have to be able to know Greek in order to interpret the New Testament. I am not a Greek student. But when my thoughts are confused about the meaning of the word, I go to my *Strong's Concordance* and my *Greek-English Lexicon* by Arndt and Gingrich. They have enriched my appreciation of the Scriptures immeasurably.)

1. *Kairos*.

Several Greek words are translated *time* in New Testament Scripture, but the two that are seen in most definite contrast are *kairos* and *chronos*. We must not confuse the two. Your watch, if it is correct, keeps *chronos* time. The calendar gives the *chronos* date. *Chronos* time is fixed, immovable. If two men were born at the same moment seventy years ago, their *chronos* age is the same. Man has been able to go to the moon because *chronos* time is dependable. Scientists are able to determine exactly where the moon will be at any given second during the next millennium! Such time never varies.

Kairos time, however, is dependent on various things. For example, it is used in Matthew 21:34 to indicate the time of harvest. Now: Can any farmer mark his calendar for next year, and say, "We will

harvest our corn on this date"? No, the time of the harvest is dependent on the weather—the sunshine and rain, for instance. The time of harvest is a *kairos* time, not a *chronos* time.

Some other New Testament instances of this word *kairos* are Mark 11:13, Luke 8:13, II Timothy 4:6, II Thessalonians 2:6, and Galatians 6:9. In each case, there are determining factors, not a definite day, hour, and minute.

Problems in prophetic date-setting arise from the fact that students of future events want a *chronos* date for a *kairos* time! God's clock is not like man's. Study carefully the use of *kairos* in Ephesians 1:10, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." All conditions had to be ready when Christ came the first time, and they will have to be ready when He comes again!

Jesus could have returned at any moment since Pentecost and it could have fit into the revealed divine schedule. In condescending mercy, however, He is waiting until His Bride hath made herself ready. When He comes, He will have a people waiting for Him. "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin into salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). And "when the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory" (Psalm 102:16). Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). When it is built, He will come for it.

2. *Eggus*.

The Greek word *eggus* is translated *at hand*, and literally means *nearby*, without specifying how close. It is used in Luke 19:11, indicating that Jesus "was nigh to Jerusalem." Near, but how near? It is used in John 11:18 and Acts 1:12 to state that both Bethany and the Mount of Olives were nigh to Jerusalem, but the distance from those two points is different. Also John 19:20 states that Jesus was crucified nigh to the city—again the same Greek word, *eggus*, yet a different distance.

Paul used *eggus* in Philippians 4:5, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." He was not making reference to the coming of the Lord, but to the Lord Himself. A very loose translation could accurately read, "Watch how you act. The Lord is nearby."

Again the apostle employed the same Greek expression in Romans 13:11, "And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Think about that statement. If a man has been a Christian forty years, his "salvation" is forty years nearer than when he believed. If another has known the Lord as Savior one month, his "salvation" is thirty days nearer than when he believed. Yet the same word *eggus* is used to define both periods.

God does not tease men, nor does He lie to them. He would not taunt the early Church with the possibility of His imminent return when all the while

He never intended to make His appearance back on earth for two thousand years. Understand this: *He could have come any time during the last two millennia if His Church had been ready.* If you doubt that, you will have just cause to question Paul's eschatology; and if you question his eschatology, you may equally question all his theology. Paul looked for the rapture in his day! See I Thessalonians 4:17 and I Corinthians 15:51, 52.

The teaching of Revelation 1:3 is simply this: Don't set a date; when the Lord sees that the time is right, He will come. His return is ever nearby, so live in the light of His coming. And ever pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

12 THE TIME IS AT HAND

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.—Revelation 1:3.

The most priceless china breaks the easiest. The more valuable the antique the more it must be protected. The irreplaceable painting of a historic master must be guarded from the careless touch of the curious. No student of music begins his career on a Stradivarius.

This axiom stands: *That which is most valuable is most easily hurt.* The eye cannot survive under the pressures which are commonplace to the foot. Paul recognized this principle, and he wrote, "Nay much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our comely parts have more abundant comeliness" (I Corinthians 12:22, 23).

We must recognize that this basic principle of nature and of life is also equally true in matters of Bible religion. It is most apparent in the study of

prophecy. Since prophecy provides the strongest motivating force for Christian living, prophecy has been the target for some of the strongest attacks by the wicked one. And in what better way could he turn the heads of the believers from the study of this vital subject than by making it look ridiculous?

No single facet of Christian doctrine has produced so much diversity of opinion as has the study of eschatology—the doctrine of future events. The gamut of conflict has gone from self-proclaimed messiahs to the spiritualizing of all predictions of Scripture. Closely related is the so-called “science” of astrology with its bedfellows, such as crystal balls, tarot cards, palm reading, and phrenology. And now and then somebody gets a “vision” which is not corroborated by Scripture, but which is nonetheless proclaimed as gospel.

Even within the ranks of students who adhere strictly to the Word, the interpretations are kaleidoscopic. Inasmuch as transcendent prophetic truths are couched in metaphors, similes, and indescribable scenes, and inasmuch as the study of prophecy necessarily involves dates and numbers, the prospective prognostications are as the sands of the seashore for multitude.

Read forty books on prophecy and no two will agree on every point, yet each one will defend his position with direct quotes from God’s Word. You will be tempted to throw up your hands in despair, avowing that the whole subject is too complicated. Your mind will be boggled at the multiplicity of

manipulations—all feasible and logical, yet different from others that are just as sensible. Some will be absolutely ridiculous, yet they too will have built on a basis of an isolated Scripture.

But don't give up! Yes, prophecy is hard to understand, but it is profitable. Yes, there are diversities of interpretations, but bear this in mind: The grandeur of the subject is evidenced by the multiplicity of viewpoints. The diamond sparkles; one sees one color, while someone else is captivated by another color. Yet all agree that it is a diamond.

You can't afford to put prophecy on the shelf—not if you are a believer in the inspired Scriptures. You don't discard valuable dishes just because they break so easily; neither should you toss the subject of prophecy onto the trash heap of irrelevancy simply because it can be prey to vultures of prejudice.

All prophetic truth is summed up in one statement written on Patmos: "*the time is at hand.*" If that statement is true, no believer may—at his own discretion—decide to leave the study of prophecy to others. If it is true that "*the time is at hand,*" all Christian endeavors must rush beneath the umbrella of that one consuming passion. If "*the time is*" indeed "*at hand,*" a new urgency becomes the watchword of the believer. While we continue to proclaim that "*the love of Christ constraineth us*" (II Corinthians 5:14), the consciousness of the imminent end causes us also to avow, "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*" (II Corinthians 5:11).

If the statement, "*the time is at hand,*" is not

true, we have no Bible. Destroy one link of the chain of scriptural veracity and you have no security for your soul. God's Word is an either/or situation: either we accept all of it, or none of it!

"But," some might protest, "how is it possible to put so much emphasis on a statement of urgency when nearly two thousand years have come and gone without its fulfillment? How can I convince myself that the warning, 'the time is at hand,' refers to *now*? For if I am not of that conviction, even such an inspired utterance from Scripture will seem irrelevant to me."

God, in transcendent wisdom, caused His Word to be so penned that men of all ages would be motivated to live in the light of His coming. Had He flatly announced, "I will return in about two millennia," all urgency would have disappeared from the Christian message. Furthermore we have no evidence *from Scripture* that it was God's intention to wait two thousand years. He will return when the Bride is ready for her Bridegroom.

But there is something special about the age in which we live. Although there is nothing pinpointed in Scripture to be fulfilled between Pentecost and the rapture—except, of course, that the Bride must make herself ready—there is an evidence in God's Word which assures us, beyond all guesswork, that we are *now* in the time of the end. And if the phrase, "the time is at hand," was significant for previous generations, it is absolutely vital today.

It is imperative that we refrain from setting a date

for the coming of the Lord. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Prophets who have set dates have, in reality, been tricked by the devil; for if the enemy of our souls can make prophecy look foolish by enticing men to unscripturally set dates for the return of the Lord, he will sap the strength of motivation from the arm of the Church. The Father alone knows the day and the hour. No one else does.

However, Jesus was not dishing out idle chatter when He said, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). He clearly and positively proclaimed that certain events which take place *after* the rapture will have the stage set for them *before* the rapture.

Then He became specific. "And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away" (Luke 21:29-33).

Few prophetic students disagree: *The fig tree is Israel*. There is some slight disagreement as to when the fig tree budded. Some say it was in 1948, when the prophecies of Isaiah 11 were fulfilled and a flag

flew over the State of Israel. Others feel it was in 1967, when Israel regained ownership of Mount Moriah, where the Temple used to stand. I personally believe that the former date is correct, and that there was a generation alive in 1948 that will be alive when Jesus comes!

That's not setting a date. No man knows the day or the hour, but our Lord did indicate the generation when He said, "This generation [Which generation? The generation that sees the budding of the fig tree] will not pass away, till all be fulfilled." Then, knowing some would question His affirmation, He declared, "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away." His words are true and must not be questioned simply because He zeroed in on the last generation.

How long is a generation? That's easy—a generation is a lifetime. To try to prove that a generation is either thirty or thirty-five years is to work without scriptural foundation. My brother's generation was fifteen months; my grandmother's generation was eighty-eight years. Don't try to make Jesus' statement either more or less than it is: There will be some people alive when the Lord returns who were alive when the fig tree budded! The last generation is here!

Although we do not know the day or the hour, we are not totally in the dark either. "And that, *knowing the time*, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep" (Romans 13:11). "But ye, brethren, are *not in darkness*, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (I Thessalonians 5:4).

“The time is at hand.” The message is urgent. We cannot afford to quibble over various peripheral interpolations of things to come. The message is, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matthew 24:42). “And when these things *begin* to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh.” The time is at hand.

13 GREETINGS!

The introduction is complete. The foundation is laid. All premises are in order. Beginning in the beginningless and eternal past, conceived in the transcendent mind of the only true and sovereign God, the introduction zeroes in on the now with a message of utmost urgency—"the time is at hand." All irrelevancy disappears. The book of Revelation demands front page attention in the annals of the life of every believer in Christ. Its first three verses establish its import.

After the introduction, and before the occasion of the writing and the thrust of the message, comes the greetings. Actually it includes all of verse four and half of verse five, but we will now note only the first part of the fourth verse.

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace. . . . —Revelation 1:4.

Three thoughts will now command our attention: the man who conveyed the greetings, the ones to whom the greetings were sent, and the spirit of the greetings. In our next study we will consider the

fourth truth: the Sender of the greetings—the triune God!

1. *The man who conveyed the greetings.*

His name is John. He is so identified five times in the book—in 1:1; 1:4; 1:9; 21:2; and 22:8. The matter is settled beyond all dispute: John wrote Revelation. But which John? John was as common a name in New Testament times as it is today.

Dionysius of Alexandria, a pupil of Origen, wrote, in A.D. 250, a treatise entitled *On Promises*. In it, he argued that the John who wrote the Revelation could not possibly have been the apostle John. His deductions were based on what he felt to be basic differences between the grammar of the Greek in Revelation and in John's other writings. Since Dionysius, others have continued to insist that the John on Patmos and the apostle John were two different men.

W. A. Criswell, the great Baptist pastor of Dallas, notes, however, four important things about this man John—whoever he was.

a. He was a Jewish Christian, not a Greek Christian. He thinks in Hebrew and writes in Greek. He boldly tackles the impossible task of translating Hebrew idioms into Greek. This in itself makes his language hard to understand. A fire is burning in his soul; what does he care about the syntax of the sentence? He preaches with an urgency that precludes diligent research into a foreign language. He wants to get the message across—not to impress men with his command of the Greek. His soul is

saturated with the Old Testament; more than two-thirds of the verses in the book of Revelation carry an allusion to Old Testament truth.

b. He was a man of deep spiritual insight. God's plans for the future are seen more clearly by this man than by any other New Testament writer, including even the apostle Paul. He was very near to God.

c. He was a man of tremendous, positive statements. He doesn't hesitate to call hostile Jews in Smyrna and Philadelphia the "synagogue of Satan." Neither does he fear to call a false church a "harlot." He presents Jesus Christ as a fierce King treading out the winepress of the wrath of God alone. This writer is not playing a game or trying to produce a best seller.

d. He was a man of unquestioned authority. He writes to the seven churches believing that when he speaks they will listen. Using his own name, John, he proceeds on the conviction that his identification is complete. Any other John of New Testament Scripture would identify himself. The apostle John needed no introduction. His name was his bond!

There are also at least three very strong similarities between the fourth Gospel and the Revelation:

a. Only John, of all New Testament writers, uses the word *Logos*. "In the beginning was the *Logos*" (John 1:1). In Revelation 19:13 he sees One coming from heaven whose Name is the living *Logos*. No one but John uses that word.

b. Only John, of all New Testament writers, pens the phrase "the Lamb of God." He uses the expression

both in his gospel and in the Revelation. He is the only writer to call Jesus "the Lamb of God."

c. Only John, of all four Gospel writers, calls attention to the fact that a spear pierced the side of Jesus. He refers to the incident also on the very first page of the Revelation.

The preponderance of both internal and external evidence points to the apostle John as the writer of the Apocalypse. We need to beware lest we join the ranks of the "debunkers," spending more time in wrecking than in building.

We shall study more about this man John when we come to verse nine. For now, however, we simply note that the man who conveyed the greetings was the apostle John.

2. *The ones to whom the greetings were sent*—"the seven churches which are in Asia."

God's plan is hidden to the world. It is revealed to His Church. Unregenerate minds relentlessly research into the secrets of tomorrow, but their most calculated conjectures are merely hypotheses. Jesus prayed, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matthew 11:25). God's greetings are to His children.

Jesus announced, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), yet John, under divine inspiration, conveys greetings to seven *churches*. Understand this clearly, for your degree of peace in the Lord's work will depend upon your degree of comprehension

of the scriptural principle: God's *Church* is made up of *churches*. Let all who berate the diversity of churches learn this well. The spectrum of problems, circumstances, difficulties, blessings, and aspirations goes from Ephesus to Laodicea. We will note them generally in verse eleven, and will endeavor to study them specifically in the second and third chapters.

But for now, let us settle on this truth: They are His churches. He is among them, correcting, instructing, advising, encouraging, warning, blessing, condemning, leading, excommunicating, teaching. Ours is not the prerogative of making a selection among them; ours is the joy of seeing Christ in every circumstance. Before pronouncing an anathema upon any of the seven churches, we must study carefully God's message to them. We will learn that human weakness has not changed through the centuries, nor has the grandeur of divine love.

God sends greetings to His children, no matter how weak and faltering they are. How nice it would be if we would simply follow the example of our heavenly Father!

"Seven churches." This expression is curious, for we have inspired information—from Scripture itself—that there were more than seven churches in Asia. The church at Colosse is well known. Paul also wrote to a church at Hierapolis. So why did John write "to the seven churches which are in Asia"? Many believe—and I am inclined to agree—that numbers play an important role in all of Scripture. And the number *seven* seems to convey the idea of

complete. Thus, the seven churches named in Revelation represent the complete Church.

(Beware, however! The study of numbers, like any good study, can get you into trouble. Don't overdo it. Don't rest your case upon it. And don't be dogmatic about numbers.)

3. *The spirit of the greetings*—"Grace be unto you, and peace."

William R. Newell, in *The Book of the Revelation*, has this excellent paragraph: "Let us see that we keep the sweet taste of grace and peace as we read of the bitter things that are coming upon the earth. If at any point throughout the terrible things which you read in these Revelation chapters, you cannot stop and look up with perfect confidence saying, 'I am under grace, and God has announced peace to me,' then you are falling into unbelief. Flee to the eighth of Romans, and to the second of Ephesians, where you belong! Your Lord will have His servant John write many things *for* you which are not *about* you."

Grace, simply defined, is the unmerited favor of God. Peace is a result only of grace; it cannot be achieved through human endeavors.

One of the more classic explanations of grace, seen in Scripture, is in the two translations of one Greek word. Jesus said, in John 15:25, "They hated me without a cause." Men had no cause for hating Jesus. He healed their sick. He raised their dead. He fed their hungry. He taught them irrefutable truth. Yet

they hated Him so much they crucified Him—without a cause.

Romans 3:24 declares that we are “justified freely by his grace.” That word *freely* is the identical word translated *without a cause* in John 15:25. Our Lord had no more cause for saving us than His generation had for hating Him! That’s grace!

Peace is a result of being right with God. See Romans 14:17. And when a man is right with God, through the channel of divine grace, the message of the book of Revelation produces a calm serenity of heart and mind. He rests in the confidence that God is upon the throne, and no puny men will usurp His authority. With this peace, the believer can sing in prison. He is not disturbed by the commotions made by man.

If the Lord opened the book of Revelation with this message, “Peace be unto you,” God’s children may rest in the transcendent assurance that *all is well!* Shalom! All the thunderings of the Apocalypse are recorded through divine grace in order that a troubled world may seek *peace* through Jesus Christ.

14 THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

John on Patmos has barely begun to write, and already he is bursting the bonds of proper grammar. His violation of the syntax of Greek sentence structure is, however, both pardonable and expected. A man in prison—a man who thinks in Hebrew, converses in Aramaic, and writes in Greek—has had a vision which “is not lawful for a man to utter” (I Corinthians 12:4). Why attempt to describe the indescribable? Why say, “I saw,” when the vision is so sublime that the highest of human intellect would dub it preposterous?

But John has his instructions: “What thou seest, write in a book” (Revelation 1:11). Jesus once gave a much simpler command to a man with a withered hand when He said, “Stretch forth thy hand” (Luke 6:10). He couldn’t stretch forth his hand; it was withered! Jesus was asking him to do the impossible! Yet with the command came the power to obey, and “his hand was restored whole as the other.”

The assignment on Patmos was a thousand times more difficult. Human eyes saw transcendent glory, and a human mind was commissioned to describe

it! (True, he had divine anointing—but even the unction of the Spirit does not necessarily enlarge a man's vocabulary.)

Thus in his first descriptive efforts in the penning of the Apocalypse, John does violence to grammar “which no schoolboy who knew Greek could make” (Barclay). The greetings begin:

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.—Revelation 1:4, 5.

John moves rapidly from the simple to the sublime, from the mundane to the miraculous, from the everyday to the eternal. As he writes, the grandeur grows.

“John.” That's simple enough. What's more common to a man than his own name? One of the first words a child learns to write is his name.

“To the seven churches which are in Asia.” The ordinary now begins to blend with miraculous. John was fairly well acquainted with some, if not all, of the seven churches he addresses. He knew their weaknesses as well as their strengths. And he must have remembered the words of Jesus, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). He knew that divine life flowed through those congregations.

“Grace be unto you, and peace.” The prophet on Patmos is now a theologian. The terms *grace* and *peace* are so profound as to fill entire libraries. They will be the bases for everlasting praise to God from

the lips of the redeemed. Their depths can never fully be fathomed by created beings.

It is, however, the seer's next description which breaks all bounds of ordinary speech. Before his vision on Patmos, he most likely would have written: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." But now that he has beheld heavenly sights, such expressions are insufficient to suit the seer.

1. The Father is called "him which is, and which was, and which is to come." Greek scholars tell us that there is no way to give an accurate English translation of what John actually said about God. He deliberately uses the nominative case when the structure of the sentence demands the genitive. Although I do not know Greek, it is amusing to peruse the theologians' attempts to unravel the mystery of language. Barclay, I believe, says it best when he asserts that John "has such an immense reverence for God that he refuses to alter the form of the name of God, even when the rules of grammar demand an alteration."

The message is from the eternal One, the self-existent Source of everything. God is the eternal "I Am." He dwells outside the realms of space and time. John's apparent butchering of the Greek paints the accurate picture: in the past God exists, in the present God exists, in the future God exists. There is, in fact, no past, present, or future with God. He always was; He had no beginning. He shall always be; He shall have no ending. And the future is as plain to Him

as the past. He does not dwell in the sphere called time.

We are everlasting; God is eternal. We had a beginning, but shall have no absolute cessation of existence; God had no beginning. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He created all things, and directs every particle of every atom in every galaxy. Standing on the highest plateau of vision, John could not simply say, as did Paul: "Grace be unto you; and peace, from God our Father" (I Thessalonians 1:1). John's view is not confined to that of sonship; he sees God as the *Administrator of the universe*. He is on His throne, directly controlling all things.

2. John sees the Holy Spirit as "the seven Spirits which are before his throne." If, in his description of the Father, John defied grammar, his description of the Holy Spirit seems to defy theology and the doctrines of the Bible. There is only *one* Holy Spirit, and He is a Member of the triune God. His person and work fill the pages of Scripture, from Genesis 1:2—"the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"—to Revelation 22:17—"the Spirit and the bride say, Come."

So what's this about *seven Spirits*? Is John so divinely inebriated that his view is distorted? Or is this vision of another than the Spirit Himself?

Two answers are offered. Many see a connection with Isaiah 11:2, and speak of a sevenfold Spirit of God. Zechariah 3:9 and 4:6, 10 support this view, that the Spirit has a sevenfold way of working. These

Scriptures are worthy of much study, and there is weighty evidence that the Holy Spirit works in seven ways.

My mind, however, is more fully satisfied with the same usage of the word *seven* as seen both times in Revelation 1:4. *Seven* churches and *seven* Spirits. Those seven churches are a complete representation of the one true Church; there is no need to look for an eighth. There are seven, yet there is only one. So with the seven Spirits: He is complete. No work is beyond Him. As John looked at seven churches and saw the one true Church, so in looking at the seven Spirits he saw the one true Spirit.

One more connection should probably be pointed out. Seven churches—seven Spirits. God is in each church by His Spirit. And no church has a fragment of the Spirit; we each have Him in His fullness. The divine supply will always be more than sufficient for the human need.

3. Curiously, John names the second Person of the Trinity last. "And from Jesus Christ." There is likely a significance in the change of order. John knew Jesus well. He was the nearest to the Lord of all twelve apostles, known as "that disciple whom Jesus loved." And now, on Patmos, His appreciation for the Lord grows, for he now sees the Lord in His proper setting—not wearing sandals and getting dirty feet but as an equal Member of the eternal triune God. Three designations are assigned to the Lord.

a. He is Jesus Christ, "the faithful witness." The word "witness" in the Greek is exactly the same as

the word “martyr.” It is a noun, not a verb—something one *is*, not merely what one *does*. Jesus was a Martyr to His testimony. He was faithful. When speaking for us before the throne He never betrayed our trust; when speaking to us for the Father He never betrayed the Father’s trust. Jesus will be forever praised by the redeemed of all ages because He is forever the faithful Witness, the faithful Martyr. The world even today wants such a Man, and He is available!

b. Jesus Christ is “the firstborn of the dead.” Others who came out of their graves were merely re-animated. They had to die again. Each of them had a second funeral. Only Jesus came out of the grave without blood. Thus He defeated death, man’s “last enemy” (I Corinthians 15:26). Of others, such as Lazarus, it could be said that they arose from the dead, but of Jesus Christ the announcement is made, “The Lord is risen *indeed*” (Luke 24:34). “Death hath no more dominion over him” (Romans 6:9). He alone defeated death, and “we shall live also” only because He lives.

c. Jesus Christ is “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” During the temptation in the wilderness, Satan took Jesus upon a high mountain and offered Him the kingdoms of the earth. Jesus rejected Satan’s offer, for He is going to rule the world in righteousness.

Newell beautifully notes: “This characterizes the whole book of The Revelation. Our Lord Jesus Christ is not seen in His work of redemption—that is

Romans; nor in His office as High Priest and Advocate on high—that is Hebrews and 1 John; but the first great question in The Revelation is, *Who shall rule—Satan and man? or God by Christ?*”

John’s introduction of Jesus Christ is transcendent. He will not merely say, “This message comes to you from a Man I met in Nazareth a few years ago. I heard Him speak. I touched Him with my hands. I saw Him die. I saw Him alive after death. And I saw Him ascend beyond the clouds.”

No, the vision on Patmos changes John’s introduction of the Lord. (Compare with 1 John 1:1.) He now views the Lord of glory, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Administrator of all things. And he begins to shout. Can you blame him?

Don’t get too low a vision of the Lord! He isn’t defeated, and He is not going to be defeated. “Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”

15 THE SHOUTING SEER

Let all who equate the book of Revelation—and the prophetic message—with gloom and doom read its opening paragraphs again. The prisoner on Patmos has hardly begun to write, and already he is shouting. The euphoria of his sublimation so enraptures his soul that he is forced to put a parenthesis into the divine directive. He is commissioned to send a message to seven churches in Asia. Obediently he introduces the document and sends greetings to saints he knows, loves, and misses so very much. But when he records the fact that the greetings emanate from the almighty triune God, he is simply compelled to make a praise detour before he relays the message itself. He has seen the Lord, and therefore the very mention of His Name causes the seer to shout:

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.—Revelation 1:5, 6.

John is shouting. Oh, there may be no movement of his body, no clapping of his hands, no dancing with his feet. But he is shouting nonetheless. A miracle has happened *within* the prophet. The “peace

of God which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7) is keeping his heart and mind through Christ Jesus. He is happy, and he expresses his happiness in a triumphant shout of praise to God.

Before we consider the why, how, and when of shouting, we should define our terms and ask

I. WHAT IS SHOUTING?

Technically, a shout is "a loud burst of voice." Inherent in the word is the idea of utmost volume. When we think of someone being "within shouting distance," or when we read the words, "He shouted, 'Stop!'," the concept of a whisper or a "still small voice" never comes to mind. The word "shout" immediately connotes the thought of noise—most likely of a loud, vociferous noise. Shouting and timidity do not seem to be even shirttail cousins.

But there are other connotations to the word "shout," and they are as viable as the concept of noise. Shouting connotes the idea of triumph. Noise without meaning is nonsense. And shouting does not necessarily have to bring down the rafters. I can shout the victory in physical quiet as well as in a bombastic barrage of bellowing. Neither extreme should be condemned, nor should either one be portrayed as the preferable mode of shouting. Shouting is a *condition*, not an action. In the spiritual life it is predicated on faith, not on feeling.

Hold on, now—I'm not speaking against exuberance. I have seen many a saint who, like David, "danced before the Lord with all his might" (II Samuel 6:14). He was shouting. I have also seen

many a saint who, like Solomon, "stood before the altar of the Lord . . . and spread forth his hands toward heaven: And he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath" (I Kings 8:22, 23). He, too, was shouting.

Shouting is a spiritual condition of the heart, and should not be judged either by the presence of or the absence of physical emotion. The psalmist wrote of a time when "the mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs" (Psalm 114:3). Now that never physically happened, but the observer of the delivering power of God had such a triumph within his soul that the whole physical creation was shouting.

II. WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN SHOUT?

Because he or she feels good? Well, it's hard to keep from shouting when you feel good—that's for sure. But the transcendency of Christianity is that shouting is predicated on faith rather than on feelings, on facts rather than on passing emotions. John on Patmos beautifully listed the three facts which occasion the shout of triumph in the heart of the believer, and all of them are about the wonderful works of the Lord.

1. *He loves us.* The phrase "unto him that loved us" should be in English, as it is in the Greek, in the present tense: "to him who loves us." J. A. Seiss wrote, "We are apt to think of the great love of God as past; as having spent its greatest force, and reached its highest culmination, when he gave his only

begotten Son to humiliation and death in our behalf. But in this we are mistaken. That love is *a present love*, and in as full force at this moment as when it delivered up Jesus to the horrors which overwhelmed him on the cross."

He loves us. If we want the shout of triumphant praise to ring out in our souls, let us contemplate the present, personal powerful love of God. Yes, He evidenced His love at Calvary, but did not consummate it there. And when we look at that awful Cross, remembering that the magnificent love which held our Savior to the tree is as vibrant, alive, and active today as it was then, the gloom of earth's frustrations and loneliness flees like a mist before the morning sun.

Our love grows or diminishes. *God's* love cannot grow, nor can it wane; it is perfect! It is changeless. Thus, we can view—with the eye of faith—the love manifest at Golgotha and know how much God loves us today. We shout to know that "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

"He loves us." More than anything else, this world wants love. The yearning for love motivates man in practically every endeavor of his life. He toils and sweats for it, he plans and labors for it, he sacrifices and dies for it. I am not referring to a cheap, lurid, sensuous thing some call love; I speak of that innate sense within man that he has to *belong*. He is not an island, and he soon discovers that loneliness is the

awfullest feeling in the world. The secular song of a few years ago expressed the yearning when it said, "You're nobody 'til somebody loves you."

Many an individual has found a way to put an end to his life on earth—and the note left behind simply said, "Nobody cared." So it is no wonder the profound revelation that "He loves us" caused a doxology to begin to ring in the soul of the prophet on Patmos. It'll happen every time. The loneliness of Patmos disappears before the consciousness of the personal and powerful love of God.

2. *He loosed us.* Rather than "washed us from our sins in his own blood," the statement is "set us free from our sins in his own blood." Yes, our past sins were washed away, but that is not enough. We needed release from chains that bound us as well as pardon for wrongs we had done.

And Jesus' blood has set us free! By faith in the miracle of Calvary, we are loosed from the power of sin. The Bible says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14). Jesus said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Sin is powerful. It can make a man do things he would not ordinarily do. Sin separates families. Sin puts men into the gutter. Sin robs women of the sanctity with which they were so beautifully endowed. Sin lures young people into the dope scene—and never warns them that there's a hook inside the bait. Sin compels men to take the lives of those they love.

But Jesus Christ broke the devil's fist at the Cross. The heel of the Seed of the woman bruised the head of the serpent. And by virtue of the atonement of our Lord, we may today rejoice in the fact that we are no longer in sin's prison. Jesus got the keys to death, hell, and the grave. He opened the dungeon doors and announced to all who would believe in Him, "You are free!"

When we think about the loosing done at Golgotha, we shout. Yet there's more. He loves us, he loosed us, and

3. *He lifts us.* Again something has been lost in the translation. It should read: "who has made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father" (Phillips). We are not kings; we never were, and we never shall be. But Christ has a kingdom, and in that kingdom we have been elevated to the exalted position of priests.

The "kingdom age" is not the subject here. We have been made priests in His kingdom. There is a kingdom which now exists. It is spiritual, to be sure. But who among us is ready to argue that the spiritual is less real than the material?

In fact, we should have learned by now that "the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:18). Even a casual glance through the gospels reveals the truth that although there is a kingdom of heaven to come, there is also a kingdom which now exists. And we confess it every time we call Jesus "Lord."

In His kingdom we are made priests. The office of

a priest is best defined when seen in contrast to the office of a prophet. A prophet speaks to men for God; a priest speaks to God for men. A prophet pleads God's case to mortal ears; a priest pleads man's case to a holy God.

Our exalted position is one of responsibility. Men will be lost if we do not wear our priestly robes into the holy place, offering sweet-smelling spiritual incense to God. The question needs to be put every day, "For how many people have I been a priest today?"

The basis, then, for our enraptured praise is three-fold: Jesus loves us, He loosed us from sin, and He lifts us to cooperate with Him in saving souls from hell. This leads us to our third question:

III. HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN SHOUT?

The answer is in our text. It is simple, yet profound: "Unto him . . . be glory and dominion for ever and ever." When everlasting glory and dominion are ascribed to Jesus Christ, the child of God is shouting—whatever may be the volume of his rapture. Shouting is not measured in decibels; it is measured in direction. When attention is called to any other than Jesus, true spiritual shouting is absent.

"Unto him . . . be glory." Innately, we are all glory-seekers. We like attention; to deny it is to deceive ourselves. But when we honestly consider where we were headed before Jesus came into our lives and when we consider the unmerited favor of God manifest both at Calvary and to this very day, and when we consider the hopeless pit out of which we

were lifted, and when we consider the peace, joy, and hope which are ours right now through our Lord Jesus Christ, we have to shout, "Unto him be glory!" Honesty forbids our taking any credit for the transformation which has kept us from being in hell today. Jesus did it all. Little wonder, then, that sincere Christians love to say, "Glory to God!" It's more than just a phrase.

"Unto him . . . be dominion." Simply put, that means, "Let Him be in charge." The Christian life is more than a single once-and-for-all commitment; it is a day-by-day surrender. Jesus began a good work in us. He wants to finish it. But He cannot complete our salvation unless we consciously and willingly enthrone Him in our lives every day. James expressed it in these words, "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that" (James 4:15).

"For ever and ever." Learn it well: there is no point in the future—either in this life or in the life to come—where glory and dominion will be transferred to the saints. If there is ever to be any semblance of praise or power given to us it will only be because we are His.

IV. WHEN DOES A CHRISTIAN SHOUT?

In a sense, I suppose, we are always shouting—that is, in the same sense that we are to "pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17). But there is a world of difference between the devoted prayer that is ever rising from the soul of the believer and the conscious intercession of a crushed heart in Gethsemane. So

with shouting: There is ever to be that transcendent ascribing of praise and power to the Lord; and there are those times when nothing will do except to shout, "Praise the Lord!" In one way we "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually" (Hebrews 13:15); in another way we recognize that there are express times for express joy (see Luke 15:7).

John was a complete Christian. If you think he's going to be shouting all through the book of Revelation, you haven't read the book. He will fear, he will fall, he will tremble, he will wonder, he will marvel, he will weep, he will ask questions, he will worship. Emotions roll through his soul. One day is not like the next. He is tested and quizzed. But because the whole book is—in a beautiful sense—predicated on a shout of triumph, none of the awful visions shake the faith of the apostle.

When to shout? Start your day with a shout—every day. Awake to the consciousness of the glory and dominion of the Lord, ascribe all honor and majesty to Him, and no test of the wicked one can move you. Then, when you lay your head in peace on your pillow at night, you can say, "Amen! All is well!"

Patmos never caused the prophet to shout; neither did it keep him from shouting. You can enjoy triumph on Patmos *if* you catch a vision of the grandeur of your God. Your doxology will be, "To him who loves us and has set us free from our sins through his own blood, who has made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and power for timeless ages, amen!" (Phillips).

16 THE KING IS COMING

Ray Stedman, in *Authentic Christianity*, beautifully notes that "time is time and eternity is eternity and never the twain shall meet." On Patmos, John hovers wonderfully near that impossible zone between time and eternity. At one moment he is in time; his next syllables are uttered by a man who has lost all sense of the confines of time. He speaks from eternity. The pulpit on Patmos is a transient one. It passes quickly from time to eternity and back to time again.

The "Amen" of Revelation 1:6 marks such a transition. The seer shifts gears. He suddenly vaults from time to eternity. The plateau of his vista has changed, and he writes:

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.--Revelation 1:7.

John, like our loved ones who are now with Christ, is unaccustomed to eternity's sphere. There he sees everything at once. Chronology disappears. Sequence is nonexistent. Eyes which formerly viewed everything from the perspective of time suddenly see from the perspective of eternity, *everything* is before him,

without any such distinctions as past, present, or future—and most naturally his attention is drawn to the grandest event of all eternity: the coming of the King to planet earth!

The location of this verse in the Apocalypse is important. One view into the timelessness of eternity, and the seer shouts, “Look!” He wants all to see what first captures his attention. He considers it of prime importance. This event transcends the wonders of Bethlehem, Calvary, and the empty tomb. Those—glorious as they were—were steps toward the grandest event of all ages: the time when the King claims His planet!

John had been assigned to write. And he can’t wait to tell what he has seen. Thus, totally out of context, the prophet on Patmos leaps to the end of the book, bounding over a tome of details and triumphantly proclaiming the outcome. He announces the end from the beginning. Being unlocked from the chronological chains of time, the citizen of eternity wants the world to know that the King is coming.

It is beautiful to note the tense of John’s verb. He does not announce that the King is going to come. He does not state, “He shall come.” His vista from the precipice of eternity causes him to see those things which are going to happen as though they are happening now. So, with divine inspiration the exiled apostle writes, “Behold, he *cometh*.”

That message is needed today: “Behold, he cometh.” Its truth will uplift troubled spirits and dispel the doubts of frustrated souls. “Look! The King

is coming!" Such faith cannot possibly be disturbed by the economic, moral, social, or political upheavals of this finite hour. Why should our hearts fail us for fear? The King is coming! Why should we succumb to the fatalism rampant around us? The King is coming!

And by faith we see that event of the future as though it had already happened. We admit that the hoofprints of the wicked one have blighted this sphere. We are aware of the fact that Satan is now "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). Our eyes are not blinded to the corruption of sin which has debased God's beautiful planet. We acknowledge the fact that "we see not yet all things put under" Jesus (Hebrews 2:8). Yet we also know that the King is coming! In eternity's timelessness the book is already closed. The coming of the King in power and great glory is as fixed as any event of history. Such certainty elevates faith.

Revelation 1:7, which is the key verse of the Apocalypse, is not given for a study text about the coming of the King. The nineteenth chapter is more appropos for study. Revelation 1:7 is in Scripture at the position of transcendent hope for the child of God. John will write about awful judgments. His pen will tell about locusts out of the pit which will torment men, causing them to try to commit suicide—but suicide will be impossible. The seer will describe a river of human blood—180 miles long and 4½ feet deep. He will picture a planet without a blade of grass, without a leaf on a tree, an ocean of

clotted blood, and rivers and fountains of blood. He will talk about horrible, cancerous sores from the crown of men's heads to the sole of their feet. He will write about a planet in turmoil, reeling to and fro like a drunkard, with earthquakes causing islands to sink and mountains to be leveled, darkness causing men to gnaw their tongues for pain, blistering heat, thunderings and lightnings, and hailstones weighing one hundred pounds apiece. His pen will tell about demon-possessed men domineering earth's governments and economics, inflicting sadistic torture and death on all who indicate opposition.

But John, that disciple whom Jesus loved, will not pen one line of such horrendous descriptions until he points believers to the outcome of it all. Behold! Look! The King is coming!

Failure to appreciate the message and the strategic location of Revelation 1:7 causes men to miss the total thrust of the impact of the closing book of Scripture. They read about the doom which is imminent on this planet, and they shudder before the portents of judgments. The upstart of it all is that they strain to avoid the message of prophecy. They've read Revelation, and it scares them. Eschatological truths give them nightmares.

Their eyes are in the wrong direction. The admonition at the very beginning of the Apocalypse is, "Behold, he cometh." There is no commission to look for wrath, but to look for the King. Such a look produces a faith that transcends all the ills in this

planet's future. The vision of the coming King generates a calm serenity of assurance even when storm clouds gather.

A little girl was walking through a cemetery at sunset. Upon her exit someone asked, "Aren't you afraid?"

Her reply was, "Oh, no. I'm just passing through here on my way home!"

This is the victory of the child of God. We're just walking through this planet on our way home. Why should we be afraid? The King is coming!

17 GOD'S CLOUDS

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.—Revelation 1:7.

In Old Testament Scripture, the psalmist wrote: “Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds” (Psalm 36:5). Clouds, which have played a more prominent role in the inspired revelation of God in His Word than we might at first suspect, are destined to be in evidence in the return of the King to claim His planet. When He comes, it will be “with clouds.”

Inasmuch as it would be difficult to discover a material or a physical *reason* for His appearance “with clouds” (although I fully believe it just as written—He “cometh with clouds”), the significance must lie elsewhere. And inasmuch as Scripture is its own best interpreter, it is advisable to first examine God’s Word on the subject. Doing so we will, I believe, come to a fuller appreciation of the simple yet transcendent truth that He “cometh with clouds.”

Our outline is not intended to be exhaustive. There are many scriptural references to clouds

that will not be in our discussion. No omission, however, is intentional. Instead, I am of the opinion that the other references would only extend the train of thought which we now begin. All of us might profitably continue this study.

Did you know that there are more than one hundred and sixty scriptural references to clouds? Did you ever read a book on the subject? We read about authority, body ministry, confession, devils, forgiveness, fruit of the Spirit, gifts of the Spirit, visions, and on and on and on. All of these are vital, to be sure. But none of them has as much scriptural foundation as the subject of God's clouds.

God's clouds are

1. Clouds of promise.

The ninth chapter of Genesis contains the first record of clouds. Man had become so wicked that "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth" (Genesis 6:6, 7). A great flood came, and only Noah and his family were saved alive of all men on the earth.

After the flood, God made a covenant that He would never again destroy the world by water. As a token of His promise He put the rainbow in the clouds. "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual

generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth” (Genesis 9:12-16).

Who but God would have chosen clouds as a place to write His signature on an everlasting covenant? When Job wanted his words to last forever, he asked for them to be “graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever” (Job 19:24). But God chose clouds—nebulous, evanescent, ethereal clouds. And although even the rocks upon which the great ten commandments were written have long since passed from human view, the clouds remain. Look at the clouds, watch them change, and remember that God established an everlasting covenant there. They are clouds of promise.

God’s clouds are also

2. Clouds of His presence.

Israel was being freed from Egyptian bondage. Ten mighty miracles had compelled Pharaoh to order their release, and the journey began. Hardly had they begun to move, until “the Lord went before them by

day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them on the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the clouds by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people" (Exodus 13:21, 22).

The cloud appeared before Israel reached the Red Sea and remained until Jordan. For over forty years Jacob's children could look at the cloud—day or night—and be assured of the divine presence. Even the loneliness of the desert was transcended by the cloud. God was with them! Look at the clouds, sir, and know that your God is with you today!

God's clouds are also

3. Clouds of protection.

Israel was moving. Their exodus from the agonies of captivity seemed assured. The prayers of generations were being answered. Their rapture seemed complete. Egypt was behind them. Soon they would step out of the land of their exile. The cloud was overhead, giving assurance of the presence of Jehovah.

But the Lord would have them know that the presence would also be the protection. Before the children of Israel could hardly bat their eyes, they were trapped. Pharaoh had changed his mind and sent his army to recapture the Jews. The Red Sea lay before them. Mountains were to the right and to the left. And the army of Pharaoh was closing in behind them. The people were afraid and complained. Moses prayed. And here is the record:

“And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud of darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night” (Exodus 14:19, 20).

Pharaoh’s army stopped by a cloud! We hear a great deal nowadays about the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, but we need to remember that only the cloud allowed Israel to cross in safety. In the cloud, God took the wheels off the chariots of the Egyptians, and they cried, “Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians” (Exodus 14:25). They couldn’t fight a cloud! Stay with the cloud, child of God, and the devil can’t hurt you!

Again, God’s clouds are

4. Clouds of power.

Study carefully the nineteenth chapter of Exodus. Israel had come to Mt. Sinai. God would there speak to His people. He appeared in a “thick cloud” on the top of the mountain. And the mountain was not equal to the power of the cloud! There were thunders and lightnings; there was fire and smoke; and the whole mount quaked greatly.

Out of the cloud there was “the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.” They learned that the

cloud of the presence and the cloud of the protection is also the cloud of power. Fellowship with God is beautiful. Divine blessings are thrilling. But there must be reverence.

God's clouds are not toys placed at the whims of believers! Oh, for some old-fashioned trembling in God's presence! Pardon the vernacular, but I don't know how else to say it: Our God is not One to be messed with! He is God! His power transcends all arguments. When we are tempted to analyze the Almighty, we need to approach Mt. Sinai and behold the power of the cloud.

The Bible also teaches us that God's clouds are

5. Clouds of provision.

Turn to I Kings 18. There had been no rain in Israel for three years and six months. It had been a time of judgment. Baal had been put to the test and had been proven to be a false god. Israel had to learn that there is no God but Jehovah.

"And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say to Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was

black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain" (I Kings 18:42-45).

When Elijah's servant saw the cloud, the prophet knew that God had supplied the need. And he acted according to his faith. When in need, look for the cloud! God's provision is there.

Moving now to New Testament Scripture, we rejoice to note that God's clouds are

6. Clouds of promotion.

It was a week before the birthday of the Church. Jesus was with five hundred disciples on the Mount of Olives. He told His followers to go to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that power to witness would accompany that Holy Ghost baptism.

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). Promoted by a cloud!

Paul wrote about our blessed hope, using the same picture. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Caught up in the clouds! God's clouds will play a role in our promotion, whether we are "alive and remain" or whether "asleep."

One more. God's clouds are seen in our text,

and because of what Christ is coming to do I am calling them

7. Clouds of possession.

“Behold, he cometh with clouds.” He is coming to reap the earth’s harvest. “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle” (Revelation 14:14).

Sin has usurped this planet ever since Lucifer looked at the clouds and said, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:14). Since that day, the wicked one has been “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). The hoofprints of the devil are all over this planet—and God created it! It is His! “But now we see not yet all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:8). “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” It is longing to “be delivered from the bondage of corruption” (Romans 8:21, 22).

And when the King comes with clouds it will happen! In the space of thirty minutes, two hundred million men will die at the hand of the Lord; blood will flow to the depths of four-and-one-half feet for a hundred and eighty miles; Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit; the seventh angel will sound and heaven’s loudspeakers will be turned up so all creation can hear the triumphant announcement, “The kingdoms of this world are

become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

Look to the clouds! Watch them move. Behold their mystery. And rest confident in the knowledge that the God who manipulates the clouds can meet your need today. “Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.”

18 CHRIST IN A COMET?

Behold, he cometh with clouds: and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.—Revelation 1:7.

The contrasts between the rapture and the revelation are so apparent in Scripture that only a great stretch of the imagination can deny them. In his book, *The Rapture Question*, John Walvoord incontestibly points out several distinctions between these two events of the future. And those distinctions need to be understood, to some degree, by every believer in Christ.

Before sensible discussion, we need to define our terms, for the old axiom of logic should definitely apply: Define your terms, and stick with your definitions. Although the word “rapture” is not found in Scripture, it is commonly used as a term for the translation of the saints—seen in such passages as I Thessalonians 4:15-18 and I Corinthians 15:51, 52. The word “revelation,” when used in the context of Christ’s coming, speaks of the event spoken of many times in Scripture, but most specifically in Revelation 19:11-16. However, we refuse to quibble

over terms. The significance is in the event, not in the appellation attached to it.

We believe that the rapture of the Church is imminent, and will definitely precede Daniel's seventieth "week." We believe that a period of about seven years will lapse on earth between the rapture and the revelation. We believe that the Church will return to the earth with the Lord at the revelation, and that we shall then rule and reign with Him on this planet for a thousand years.

All this does not, however, imply that there are two more Advents of our Lord in the divine agenda. An Advent is a time when Jesus comes to the earth. He came once, when He was born in Bethlehem. He will come again at the revelation. The rapture is an *event* rather than an *Advent*; the Lord's coming "in the air" is not a trip to the earth, and thus must not be construed as an Advent.

At the rapture the Lord is coming *for* His saints; at the revelation He will come *with* His saints. At the rapture the saints will meet the Lord in the air; at the revelation the Lord will come to the earth and His "feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives" (Zechariah 14:4). At the rapture the Church is translated; there is no translation at the revelation. At the rapture the dead in Christ are resurrected; there is no resurrection at the revelation. At the rapture saints are taken out of a world where Satan continues to hold sway; at the revelation Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit. There are no scriptural prophecies of events which must

precede the rapture; the revelation, however, takes place in a precise order of events.

Revelation 1:7 points out the fact that when Christ comes "every eye shall see him." The prophet on Patmos was, of course, referring to the revelation, not the rapture. At the rapture Jesus will come "in the twinkling of an eye" (I Corinthians 15:52); at the revelation "then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). These two comings must be distinct one from the other. First He will come "as a thief in the night" (I Thessalonians 5:2), then He will come in such a manner that "every eye shall see him" (Revelation 1:7).

Every eye shall see Him. But how can this be? How is it physically possible for "every eye" on earth to see Him? If the earth is round, and if the Lord comes "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," how can people on the other side of the world see Him?

I used to suspect that when the Lord comes "with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 14) He might make a quick orbit of this planet, allowing all kindreds, all tribes, to see Him—just as the Bible says they will. But the last few years have produced a lot of changes in prophetic guesses, and many have now concluded that the miracle of television will enable this prediction to be fulfilled. It has been surmised that while Jesus approaches this planet in

the region of the Mid-East, the rest of the world can watch the magnificent scene right in their own living rooms—and in living color!

Such surmising, however, fails to take into account some of the facts of the occasion. The Bible says, "Every eye shall see him," and we all know that to see a person on television can in no way be equated with seeing him. For example, I have seen several Presidents of the United States on television, yet I have never seen a President.

Furthermore, the time of the revelation must be considered. It will be at the close of "tribulation such as never was." The earth will have ceased to be "the big blue marble." Oceans will have turned to blood as of a dead man. All vegetation will have been burned up under the torturous heat of the sun. Men will be writhing in the torments of running sores from head to toe, and many scholars believe that the scriptural account indicates running sores with worms in them. The inhabitants of the earth will be trying to commit suicide, but during the last five months of Daniel's seventieth "week" suicide will be impossible. This globe will be a geophysical mess: thunders, lightnings, earthquakes causing islands to sink and mountains to be leveled, and hailstones weighing one hundred pounds apiece.

Now, even if television would fulfill this prophecy—which it won't—doesn't it seem a bit out of place to imagine a world watching television at a time like that?

The Bible says, "Every eye shall see him." It

also pinpoints the Jews in Petra: "And they also which pierced him." Categorically it embraces this entire sphere: "All kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him."

Let me suggest something. It nowhere strays from the plain teachings of Scripture. It may seem to be too simple a solution to the mystery, but hasn't God often worked in ways that human brilliance called "simple"? Think about the Baby in Bethlehem's manger, for instance. And your Bible says that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise"; for "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (I Corinthians 1:27, 25).

Inasmuch as the revelation is nowhere said to be "in the twinkling of an eye" (besides, if it were, could a television camera catch it?), may not the revelation resemble the approach of a comet from outer space? Comets have headed our way before. And Halley's Comet is to head this way again in 1986. So, for a while, men on the earth will not be shaken by the apparent approach of a comet from outer space. They will have so many problems down here that a few more mysteries in the heavens will hardly be noticed—for a while.

And every eye shall see! As the earth continues to rotate on its axis, all shall soon become aware of a comet-like approach to this planet. Little by little they will come to the conclusion that this is no ordinary comet. Then they will see that it is not a comet at all. That which at first appeared to be the "tail" of the comet shall be seen to be "the

armies which were in heaven" (Revelation 19:14)—
"ten thousands" of the Lord's saints (Jude 14).
Then the "head" of the comet will be seen to be
the "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF
LORDS" (Revelation 19:16)!

When men recognize Him they will cry for rocks
and mountains to hide them from His face. But
there will be no place to hide! He is coming to
tread out the fierceness and wrath of God. He is
coming to claim His planet. He is coming to bind
Satan and cast him into the bottomless pit.

John saw His coming, and he wrote: "And I saw
heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that
sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and
in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His
eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head
were many crowns; and he had a name written,
that no man knew, but he himself. And he was
clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his
name is called The Word of God. And the armies
which were in heaven followed him upon white
horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.
And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with
it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule
them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the wine-
press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.
And he hath on his vestures and on his thigh
a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD
OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:11-16).

That day will come! The question is "Where will
you be?" You are making your decision right now.

19 AMEN! AND ITS ECHO

... Even so. Amen.—Revelation 1:7.

The prophet's pen is bilingual. His expression is in Greek (*nai*—"even so") and in Hebrew (*amen*—"so be it"). But inasmuch as the Holy Spirit, not John, is the Author of the Apocalypse, we must beware lest we intimate that the exiled prophet was merely displaying linguistic ability. No words are added to Scripture to merely fill up space.

The statement is repeated in order that it may be especially emphasized—such as our Lord often did, for example, when He would say, "Verily, verily." Careful reason insists that one "verily" would have been enough; Jesus is Truth itself! Yet who among us is prepared to correct *Him*? His double emphasis was for our benefit, not His. Similarly, the *nai amen* of Revelation 1:7 demands our special attention.

The statement is a universal message. It is made in the languages of the Gentiles and the Jews. Sinners need to hear it; so do believers in Christ. None may justifiably shun its impact.

An obvious question, however, most naturally arises: *Who is speaking?* Is God making a decree

with the absolute affirmation of almightiness—"so be it"? Or is John bowing humbly before the revealed plan of the sovereign God with a sincere spirit of surrender—"so be it"? The answer is not as easy to find as we might suspect. There are examples of both in Revelation. The Lord Himself uses it in 1:18 and 3:14. John definitely speaks it (by divine inspiration, of course) in 22:21 and most likely in 22:20. That the word can be used by another than God Himself is proved in 6:14.

I accept the premise that two truths are here, depending on the identity of the speaker. And inasmuch as the word is spoken twice—and in two languages!—both applications are valid. We may view this as God decreeing: "Even so. So be it." And we may also properly consider it as man agreeing: "Even so. So be it." One facet of this truth is objective; the other is subjective. Both are imperative.

1. God decreeing.

"Even so. Amen." This ought to be sobering. We are already aware of the divine positivity in the sense of pronounced blessings, and we rejoice to remember that "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen" (II Corinthians 1:20). It excites us to remember that God has promised good things to those who walk in His ways. And we are tempted to continually remind Him—verbally or mentally—that He must keep His precious promises. We meditate on select phrases of promises and remind

the Almighty that "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent" (Numbers 23:19).

But we also need to read the book of Revelation and remember that same truth! I wonder, have we even begun to examine the ramifications of the judgments of the book? Have we tried to contemplate the length of eternity, the awfulness of the lake of fire, and the finality of death? Does the phrase, "everlasting punishment," cause us to at least stop and think?

On this consideration Seiss wrote, "Brethren, it does seem to me when I look at the Scriptures on this subject, that even the best of us are not half awake." The practical truth is this: We do not believe God! Oh, we are anxious to elaborate on His blessings, the privileges He has provided, and the bounties of faith. But until we can believe God's "amen" about judgment to come, the quality of our faith in His "amen" about promises is fraudulent. The same Sovereign who writes "blessed" also writes "woe."

God wants the reader of the Apocalypse to know the seriousness of this book. It's as though He says, "I mean it! It will happen like I say! These things are not written to elicit your comments; they are true! Believe these things if you believe anything at all! I am not playing a game with you! Someday you'll be in eternity, and I'm telling you now about the future!"

The Apocalypse is the outline of the future. It

is not open to debate. God says, "It will be." That settles the matter. Our quibbling will not change the blueprint.

2. Man agreeing.

"Even so. So be it." This repeated phrase may be properly viewed as the expression of the surrendered mind of the apostle John. He hears the thunders. Peering into the telescope of prophecy he sees the wrath of God upon the wicked. Rather than devise devious arguments against the goodness of God, he recognizes both the love, the wisdom, and the justice of God. John refuses to set himself up as a judge of the doings of Deity. He surrenders, saying, "Even so. Amen."

What kind of people would we be if we really believed the warnings of the book? Would we continue to go everywhere we now go? Would we continue to read what we now read? Would it change our daily conversation? Would we continue to withhold time, talent, and money from God's service? Would we participate in anything that causes division in Christ's mystical body? Would we continue to argue for, and fight for, "our" rights? Would we forsake God's house and God's Book and God's work and God's will?

I am convinced that if we even half-believed the "amen" of the book of Revelation we would become totally involved in winning a lost world to the Christ of Calvary. We would write letters, make phone calls, right wrongs, make restitutions, spend

hours in prayer, speak to the lost with a reckless boldness, and gladly deny ourselves things which now seem to be a big part of our lives. Our hearts would be literally crushed over the fate of unsaved loved ones. We would devote ourselves to the consuming responsibility of taking up our cross daily and following our Lord. No demons could detract us. No friends could discourage us. No affliction could slow us down. Rest would become unimportant, and doing God's will would become the motivation of our every action.

If we would honestly echo our "amen" to the divine "amen" this world would call us fanatics—for we would not be looking at the seen, but at the unseen (II Corinthians 4:18). Our loins would be girded about, our lights would be burning, and we would be like men that wait for their lord (Luke 12:35, 36).

Why don't we believe the book of Revelation? Are we unsure of its right to be in the pages of Holy Scripture? Do we honestly believe that it is inspired? If our heads agree to its inspiration, why do our hearts hesitate to say, "Amen"?

The damning truth is that we view the book of Revelation like we view the dead body of an unsaved loved one. In our hearts we know where he is—but we don't want to think about it. So we make funerals short. Quickly we pay respectable homage, but we want to hurry up and get out of there. We want to forget it. If we were to think about it, it would change our lives—and we're not ready for that!

Listen to the counsel of the Preacher of Old Testa-

ment Scripture: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Simply because the Almighty does not put a man into hell fire the moment he sins, foolish man convinces himself that the message of judgment is not true. Or at best our response is, "He prophesieth of the times that are far off" (Ezekiel 12:27).

The divine decree solemnly announces: "Even so. Amen." These things shall be. Our reply must be one of humble and willing agreement: "Even so. Amen." Anything less means eternal destruction.

20 THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JESUS

The final volume of Scripture is singular in many ways. Difficulties in understanding its mysteries have caused some to ignore it—and some even to deny its propriety in the pages of Holy Writ.

Yet the book is attested to by a signature given to no other manuscript in the Bible. The writings of the seer on Patmos are abruptly interrupted by a word from the Lord. That word is both His signature and His autobiography: Jesus uniquely describes Himself.

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.—Revelation 1:8.

The interruption comes at a moment when the imprisoned prophet is writing about the grandest event of the ages: the coming of the King to claim His planet in power and great glory! The ecstasy of the announcement, “Behold, He cometh!” is so far beyond the concepts of finite logic that its very drama may easily cause the imagination of these infinitesimally small specks of dust called man to relegate it to the realm of mythology. It is difficult to imagine

that the event will actually transpire. It is much easier to say, "All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (II Peter 3:4).

So the Lord Himself speaks. He sees the lines penned by the prophet, and He knows that the minute mind of mortal man will question the veracity of the seer's vision. Jesus knows that "educated" students of Scripture will suspect that John was suffering some kind of hallucination—that his tenure on Patmos had made him "stir crazy." But the writings of the Apocalypse are so vital to meaningful motivation for day-by-day Christian living, and must not be brushed aside as the irrelevant scribblings of a madman in exile, that the Lord did a singular thing in Holy Writ: He signed the book.

It's as though the Savior were saying, "John, men will question your writings. And I want the world to know that these mysteries are not a product of your pen; I want men to know that these truths emanate from Me. John, put it down that I am delivering this message."

Like Moses long before, John needed to know what divine signature to use. Moses, in the backside of the desert, upon receiving a divine ordination to lead Israel out of Egyptian captivity, once asked, "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them?" (Exodus 3:13). Somehow Moses, who most certainly must have known God's Name (didn't Jochebed teach him?), knew that

each aspect of the divine working among men demands a particular revelation of God. And God is known by His name!

John knew that, too. He had even written a Gospel in which he had recognized several of the wondrously significant names of the Lord. None of them could possibly be minimized. But innately John knew—or sitting at the feet of Jesus he had learned—that the Nazarene would never say, “I am the Door,” to men who are spiritually hungry. To them He would say, “I am the Bread of life.” The revelation must be peculiar to the need.

Now, on Patmos, John needs to know which signature of our Savior to use. Shall Jesus here be called the Shepherd? The Lily of the valley? The King? The Lamb of God? The Water of life? The Way? The Truth? The Life? Shall He be called Wonderful? Counsellor? The mighty God? The everlasting Father? The Prince of peace? Each of these titles—and a hundred others—is of inestimable worth and stands as a singular revelation of a particular aspect of God’s glory.

But when Jesus will describe Himself in the New Testament book which transcends time and space, He writes a spectacular autobiography. Briskly bypassing a multitude of inspired appellations, Jesus writes the story of Himself in terms as full, complete, and accurate as mortal language can tell.

Basically, Revelation 1:8 can be reduced to one term: Jesus is complete. The verse itself, however, amplifies the term and, without exhaustive elaboration,

tion, states that Jesus is complete in time, in eternity, and in redemption. Note them briefly.

1. *Jesus is complete in time.*

"I am Alpha and Omega." (We need not discuss the expression, "the beginning and the ending," which most scholars agree to be a translator's interpretation, and not part of the original text.)

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and *omega* is its last letter. The phrase *alpha to omega* is in itself a transliteration of the hebraism *aleph to tau*—*aleph* being the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *alpha*, and *tau* corresponding in Hebrew to the Greek *omega*. The expression indicates absolute completeness. The rabbis said that Abraham kept the Law from *aleph* to *tau*. They also said that God has blessed Israel from *aleph* to *tau*. This expression, then, indicates a completeness from which nothing is lacking.

Jesus is complete in every aspect. He is complete in love, in power, in purity, in compassion, in forgiveness, in righteousness, in kindness, in humility, in grandeur—in every way. It is imperative that we learn this, for, for example, there are times when in dealing with ourselves or with others we are tempted to entertain the thought that our sympathy and compassion are greater than that of our Lord. We secretly suspect that if we were God we would do things differently—that we would show acts of kindness which apparently are not emanating from Him now.

Our view is, of course, obstructed by the low plateau of our position. We do not understand

tomorrow, thus we are not in a position to judge what is best. And failure to appreciate the fullness of Jesus distorts our perspective of Christianity, making us think that we are more merciful than He.

Imagine any virtue within the periphery of human perception: Jesus is the fullness of that virtue!

Are we tempted, when confronted with dire affliction, to believe that if we were God we would do something about it? Inadvertantly we are saying that we are more complete than He! Not so! He is *aleph* to *tau*. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." And we are complete in Him (Colossians 2:9, 10). "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). He is the God "in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways" (Daniel 5:23).

Furthermore, we should note that *alpha* and *omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; there is a beginning and there is an ending to the alphabet. Jesus Himself is eternal, but time is not. Time, as we understand it, is like the alphabet, having a beginning and an ending. Thus, when time began, Jesus was there; and when time shall come to an end, Jesus will be there. He fills time completely.

2. *Jesus is complete in eternity.*

"Which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." Part of this untranslatable phrase is repeated from verse four, and it speaks of eternity. Two words are added, however, and they depict the fact that the Christ who inhabits eternity is Almighty.

In our English translation the sense of the expression is, "which is the Almighty, and which was the Almighty, and which is to come the Almighty." This phrase transcends both time and human imagination. We can comprehend neither the concept of the world called eternity nor of absolute might. Our Lord has the might and dwells in eternity. All might has forever been His; all might is His today; and might shall be His throughout the unending ages of eternity.

Jesus existed before all things. All things were created by and for Him. And by Him all things consist—every atom in every galaxy is under His direct control. Men may "discover" laws of motion, laws of gravity, laws of light, etc., but let's not deceive ourselves: our Lord specifically controls all things. And when we consider that no point in the universe is any nearer the center of the universe than any other point in the universe (!), and that our Lord has all might over all the creation, there are two immediate and contrasting responses: *one*, the grandeur of it all "blows our mind" in absolute amazement; and, *two*, we are humbled to think that the great God of heaven should care so much for us as to give His only begotten Son to the ugly, atrocious, and ignominious death of the Cross.

Although our Lord is indeed "very man of very man," we err if we fail also to behold Him as "very God of very God." Seeing Him as He is—filling eternity and filling it with His almightiness—we accept His predictions as authoritative. Inasmuch as

He inhabits eternity, and inasmuch as He has all power, those things which He says will happen will indeed happen. Jesus is complete in eternity.

3. *Jesus is complete in redemption.*

The word "redemption" is not found in this autobiography of our Lord, yet its imperative is found in every phrase. Without the foundational premise of redemption, no syllable of this utterance of Jesus could possibly be meaningful to us. The absolute fact that Jesus is complete in time and complete in eternity must be effectuated and made relevant by the fact that He is complete in redemption. Otherwise, all revelation frustrates.

The very phrase, "saith the *Lord*," brings man and redemption into the picture; for although it is true that Jesus is Lord of time, of eternity, and of creation, He does not speak to time, to eternity, or to created things. At best they remain inanimate. God speaks to man.

If Jesus is indeed "Lord," He must be Master over every situation related to sinful man. And He is! He is Lord over death, Lord over sin's domination, Lord over hell, Lord over human weakness, Lord over man's perennial arch rival—Satan!

Jesus is the Alpha and Omega of redemption. He helped plan it, He carried it out, He will occasion its ultimate triumph over all the works of the devil. Our salvation is entirely of God, awaiting only our acceptance of His work. The plan and the power are His; ours is to believe.

The almightiness of Jesus is nowhere seen so vividly as in redemption. All His acts of creation and operation—grand and glorious as they are—cannot be compared to the transcendency of divine power as seen in procuring salvation for Adam's race. Think of the price of redemption! Think of Calvary and all its cruelty, blood, and death! Think of Christ's conquering hell! No cost was ever so great as that of saving sinful mankind from eternal perdition.

All Scripture comes to one focus—that of redeeming love as manifest in Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. It is God's masterpiece! The eternal ages will be filled with the song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews wrote one line which embraces the impact of Christ's autobiography of Revelation 1:8. He wrote, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh" (Hebrews 12:25). Hear some similar admonitions from the same pen: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. . . . Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things

which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:1).

Study carefully the words of our Lord in Revelation 1:8, and know that the One who *speaks* also *signs* the book of Revelation. Hear the voice of the Lord, and "see that ye refuse not him that speaketh."

21 THE SEER'S SIGNATURE

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.—Revelation 1:9.

The seer identifies himself. For the third time we are informed that the penman of the Apocalypse was a man named John—and we have hardly begun to read! Is the prophet egocentric? Are we going to be told his name in every paragraph? Why this apparent obsession with his identity?

As a matter of record, we will not come across the seer's signature again until the close of the book. In 21:2 and 22:8 we will read the identical phrase of 1:9, "I John." John will still be John; he will not be reincarnated into another form, nor will he become an angel. Whether on Patmos or viewing the new Jerusalem "coming down from God out of heaven," he is John.

But why this repetitive calling attention to himself by the exiled prophet? The reasons are really quite obvious. In verse one he was placing himself at the very bottom of the rung of revelation: God, Jesus Christ, His angel, and finally John. More transparent

humility among mortals can hardly be found on the pages of Holy Writ. The man who had been called to be an apostle at the early age of seventeen is aghast that the Almighty God should select him for such an honor! And he utters his name in verse one with genuine humility at the foot of Jesus.

John's name in verse one also shows the role and the position of a true preacher of the gospel. His spirit ever says, "You may be hearing my voice, and you may be distracted by my pronunciation of the syllables, but never forget: The message is from God! 'For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you' " (I Corinthians 11:23). John is there; he cannot be ignored, and he must not be exalted above measure. Either extreme would be wrong.

The principle is continued in verse four. The man John who received a message in verse one passes it on in verse four—"John to the seven churches which are in Asia."

How we need to learn this: As mortals we receive God's gifts and as mortals we communicate God's gifts! We are tempted at times to "hold back" lest we be guilty of being "in the flesh." Honestly recognizing our human inadequacies, we hesitate—forgetting that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (II Corinthians 4:7). Being ourselves recipients of divine grace, we are most cognizant of our frailty. In order to be born again we had to confess that we could do nothing to save ourselves—

that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

Thus it is most natural for us to fear to obey the divine directive to spread the gospel. “What? Me? I can’t preach, or speak, or testify! I just don’t have the talent!” Like Moses of old, we argue, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken to thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (Exodus 4:10).

Study Moses’ argument carefully. He not only confesses his mortal inadequacy but also recognizes that he has no more human ability after meeting God than before! It’s as though he had secretly thought that a confrontation with Deity would magically transform him from a stutterer to an articulate statesman.

Not so. Moses had no more natural talent after his experience at the bush than before. Nor do you. Nor did John. And since he was not at all embarrassed to write, “John to the seven churches,” he must have had a revelation akin to that of Moses when God said, “Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say” (Exodus 4:11, 12).

If the world’s inhabitants will hear God’s truth, they will hear it from the lips of those who have been with the Lord. And even a genuine and transcendent experience in Christ has no guarantee of making fearless and verbose orators out of us. We’ll still

stutter. But no matter, for our confidence will not be in the flesh.

The rich man in hell pleaded to have Lazarus sent back to speak to his five brothers. "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:29-31).

Your neighbors don't need an angelic visit. They don't need a vision in the night. They need to hear *you!* They know you. And if true religion cannot produce such a change in your life that they will know it's real—whether or not it makes you an abler speaker—they cannot be won to God.

The churches in Asia knew John. And a message from him would carry some weight. If men will not hear us because they know us too well, we have cause to question whether or not we are, in fact, in the faith.

But neither the humility of the servant in verse one nor the identity of the preacher in verse four can compare with the seer's signature in verse nine. Here he rises to the full height of his stature in Christ, testifying that God uses earthen clay to proclaim His glory. The noun "John" identifies him with humanity; it was given to him at the time of his birth by his parents (who, of course, little realized that their selection of a name would be so well known

for generations to come). John was flesh and blood. He could hurt, and get hungry, and bleed, and have dirty feet. He was as human as any man who ever lived.

But the pronoun "I" does not refer to a body which shall someday return to the dust. It speaks of the man himself, and not of the fleshly house in which he lives. You have never seen me; you have never heard me; you have never touched me—and you can't. All you can see, hear, or touch is this house I live in.

Being born again doesn't keep a man from having dirty fingernails! Being filled with the Spirit will not cure body odor! Walking with the Lord is no triumph over dandruff!

This is far from mundane or irrelevant; it is vital. Fail to learn it, sir, and frustrations will beset you continually. You may be a disciple indeed—a new creature in Christ Jesus—and still overeat. If we fail to recognize the principle that we are a dichotomy—a child of man and a child of God at one and the same time—we will be sorely tempted to think at times that our conversion was not genuine.

The flesh wars with the spirit, and the spirit wars with the flesh; these are contrary the one to the other. There are two of you. Which one is going to win?

The timing of John's statement is extremely pertinent. On Patmos, he was writing. He sends greetings to the churches from the Lord. While describing the Lord, a divine hand, as it were, takes over. John watches his fingers push the pencil, and

he hardly has control over the direction. He sees the words being miraculously formulated: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

As quickly as it came, the uniquely miraculous manipulation lifted. The next phrase will be as inspired as any in Scripture, but can by no means be compared to the grandeur of the Lord's own autobiography.

What will John write next? With what words can he follow the signature of the Savior? Shall he attempt to maintain the glow—to remain on the euphoric mount, writing in rapturous words about indescribable scenes in the heavenlies? Or shall he turn to the negative, writing an essay on his incapacabilities?

Beautifully, he does neither. He recognizes his position in Christ while not denying his position in the flesh. And he follows the announcement, "I am Alpha and Omega," with this announcement, "I John"! Though on Patmos, he is clothed with the supernatural, and he knows it. Though in the flesh, he is also in the Spirit.

What's your name? Can you recognize your position in Christ, and say "I John," or "I Mary," or "I Joe," or "I Sue"? Admit your humanness while announcing your citizenship in heaven! Let others delight in magnifying your faults, if they choose to do so. You, however, can rejoice in the glorious

truth that the God of heaven can use such unworthy clay.

One more thing: Be yourself! After years of serving Christ, John was still John. He never became Paul, or Peter, or Apollos. Neither will you! God called *you*. Give yourself to Him, and see what He can do with this kind of clay.

22 THE CUP AND THE BAPTISM

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.—Revelation 1:9.

John was an old man when he penned these lines. He had learned much since those first days when Jesus had called him to be an apostle. Curiously we wonder if some of his former treks toward grandeur came to mind when he wrote with such humility on Patmos. If so, there must have been tears of gratitude for the long-suffering of the Lord. Only Jesus could transform a son of Thunder into “brother, and companion in tribulation, and in . . . patience.”

Many years had gone by, many miles had been traveled, since the day a young man named John went with his older brother James to Jesus, saying, “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory” (Mark 10:37).

“But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be

baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared" (Mark 10:38-40).

On Patmos John could remember how quickly—almost too quickly—he and James had answered with two terse words the Lord's question about the cup and the baptism: "We can." How right Jesus was; He told them at the time that they didn't know what they were saying! But God does not take commitments lightly, and the Lord answered truly, "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized."

All James and John had had in their heads were visions of an imminent and glorious kingdom on earth, with each of them holding the most coveted positions. And they felt they could pay any price for such an honor.

But Jesus was looking at Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha. The cup was agony and the baptism was death. Our Lord saw in the cup and the baptism the ultimate power of sin. He saw hell attempting to invade earth. He saw the living and the dead needing Someone to stand between them.

And He said to James and John, "You shall drink the cup. You shall be baptized in blood."

They were. James was the first of the twelve apostles to die a martyr because of his unflinching faith in Jesus. And John was the only one of the Twelve who did not die the death of a martyr—excepting Judas, of course. But he drank the cup of suffering until he died a natural death of old age. Tradition, as well as Scripture, has accounts of the price John paid for his faith in Christ. Tertullian says that John was with Peter in Rome and that after a miraculous delivery from a caldron of boiling oil he went to Ephesus. The Bible tells of him being flogged (Acts 5:40). Revelation was written during his exile on the prison isle of Patmos.

Yes, he drank the cup. He drank its bitter dregs. He could write a volume which would equal or surpass Paul's awful autobiography of II Corinthians 11. He outlived twelve Roman emperors, including Augustus and Nero. Two of them committed suicide, seven were murdered, and nearly all of them were relentless persecutors of John's religion. There must have been a few times when he was almost envious of the other apostles who had long been with the Lord, while John was left behind to suffer. There were a few more dregs in the cup, and John had volunteered—nearly seventy years before!—to drink that cup.

The years, and the experiences in God's grace, had mellowed John. His egocentricism had long since gone. His former undisciplined, impulsive, passionate vigor had been brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. He was as daring as ever, but

the focal point of his spiritual drive ceased to be self, but rather Jesus.

Had he retained the spirit of his youth, the exiled prophet might have written, "I John, the only one of the Twelve yet alive," or, "I John, the only person on earth who knew Jesus in the flesh." His earlier spirit would have amplified his unique and exalted position among men. His personal advertisement would have abounded in superlatives. And he could have done so honestly, for he was "the most interesting and exalted Christian then living upon the earth—a most reverend and venerable man" (Seiss).

But the old man John is as humble in spirit as he is exalted in position. Titles are no longer important to him. In identifying himself, he will not even use the term "apostle." It is enough for him to be a "brother." No longer will he seek to call down fire on any who refuse to attend his church! No longer will he forbid men to preach unless they carry his credentials! Earth's fog has lifted, and he now sees clearly; there is no title higher than the title of "brother." Carnal cobwebs have been swept from his mind. The Spirit of his Master has infiltrated his thinking. And in the loneliness of Patmos, he recognizes that he is not alone. He is part of a family—the family of God.

The "common salvation . . . which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3) puts men on the same plane. The ground is level at the foot of the Cross. Hurriedly John notes four characteristic results of being in Christ.

1. *A common brotherhood.*

“Your brother.” In the family of God there is neither Jew nor Gentile, rich nor poor, black nor white, educated nor illiterate, bond nor free. We are brothers. Man-made distinctions disappear at the altar. Carnal comparisons lose their significance around God’s table. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. No higher honor can be given.

2. *A common suffering.*

“Your . . . companion in tribulation.” It cost something to be a Christian in John’s day. To profess faith in Jesus of Nazareth was almost tantamount to asking for an execution. And sometimes martyrdom would have been preferred to the agonies of living. Where did we get the idea that faith produces prosperity? Certainly not from the Bible!

The early Christians were “companions” in tribulation. Theirs was not to compare stripe with stripe, wound with wound, torture with torture. They adopted the spirit which John had—a spirit that said, “We’re all in this together.” The suffering is common to all God’s people. For, in fact, when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it (I Corinthians 12:26).

3. *A common royalty*

“Your . . . companion . . . in the kingdom . . . of Jesus Christ.” Gone is the vying for select positions of honor in the kingdom. Gone is the conniving for more attention than others. Gone is the readiness

to censure any who "don't do it our way."

What a change! John once got his mother to help him be lifted above all others. On Patmos, however, he is honored to be allowed to be a companion in the kingdom with many suffering brothers. This is true Christianity—to be happy to fill any position that the Lord may select.

4. A common hope.

"Your . . . companion . . . in the . . . patience of Jesus Christ." We're all waiting. The glory isn't here yet. Coronation day hasn't arrived. Our entrance into heaven awaits fulfillment. Someday the flood will subside, and the ark will rest safely in a new world. But until that day we patiently work, we patiently pray, we patiently endure, we patiently "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

We are "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). And so "we faint not . . . though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (II Corinthians 4:16). What difference whether we're on Patmos or in Ephesus? We're only waiting anyhow! Let God select our waiting room!

The cup is bitter. The baptism is undesirable. But no matter, for we belong to the tomorrow generation and we "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

23 ON PATMOS

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.—Revelation 1:9.

Patmos was a prison isle in the Aegean Sea—some thirty miles from the mainland of the country now called Turkey and about sixty miles from the great city of Ephesus. It was inhabited by the worst of criminals. Escape was impossible, so the most incorrigible prisoners were abandoned there. And “abandoned” is the proper word, for there were no guards and thus no one to protect the foulest of human flotsam and jetsom from one another.

John was there, right in the midst of the most corrupt and most hopeless of men. That “disciple whom Jesus loved”—that singular man of all the Lord’s followers to be known as the apostle of love—was dropped into a commune of hell. And who can imagine the guffs, the assaults, and the sadistic treatment that saint must have endured?

John believed in God; not another man on Patmos believed in God. John believed in holiness; not another man on Patmos even knew about holiness.

John believed in love; every other man on Patmos believed in hate. John believed in reverence; every other man on Patmos believed in destruction. John believed in decency; not another man on Patmos respected decency. John believed in morality; every other man on Patmos believed in and practiced the grossest immoralities ever imagined by a demon-possessed mind.

You wouldn't say John was in the best of circumstances! There was no man with whom he could pray, none with whom he could discuss spiritual things, none with whom he could engage in civil and decent conversation. John, who for seventy years had been busy working for Jesus, traveling near and far, establishing churches, teaching believers, was put into a situation where not one man could be reached with the gospel.

There *are* men who can't be reached! They have gone too far. Whether or not God's Spirit has ceased to strive with them, they have closed their ears and they will not hear! They have closed their eyes and they cannot see. They have hardened their hearts until the kindest message of divine love cannot penetrate their conscience. We may not be able to stop the sun from shining, but we can pull the shades so it won't shine into our room! Say what you will about "irresistible grace," the fact remains that many have resisted God's grace until the day they went into eternity—lost.

John couldn't hear a gospel service on a radio. He couldn't watch one on television. He never

received a weekly or a monthly publication to edify his spirit. There were no letters from concerned Christians, no phone calls from saints who cared.

As far as Christian fellowship was concerned, John was on Patmos alone. And as far as he knew, he would be there until the day he died. Also, from the looks of his comrades-in-exile, it appeared that his death would be soon. And ugly.

John was thrown in with criminals. Was John a criminal? What had he done? What crime had been charged against him? The very fact that he was on Patmos tells three things about him: (1) He had been charged as a criminal, (2) the charges had been “proved,” and (3) John had been deemed such a menace to society that for their sakes he had to be deported to Patmos. But what were those charges?

“For the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”! Is that all? That’s all! The man was put into the worst prison system of his day for being a proclaimer of the gospel. Specifically he had declared the authenticity of the inspired Scriptures and that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified at Calvary and resurrected from the dead three days later, was indeed the Son of God.

Now, aren’t those merely theological arguments, and couldn’t a land—admittedly polytheistic in culture—have the tolerance to admit one more religion? They did it every day. So why exile as incorrigible one man who preached a new religion? Was the man himself the problem, or was it his religion?

It was his religion. (To the shame of the church it must be confessed that there is little interest in a man's religion any more. The way he wears his collar, the length of his hair, or the color of his suit will eject him to an ecclesiastical Patmos quicker than a drastic departure from the fundamentals of the faith!) There was something so specific, so revolutionary, so transcendent about John's religion that society felt compelled to rid itself of the most effective preacher of Christianity of that day—John.

John's religion caused Dagon to fall on their faces. John's religion could never be placed alongside another. John taught the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. The word of God teaches that there is only one true God, and the testimony of Jesus teaches that the Baby born in Bethlehem's manger is God in the flesh. The word of God teaches that gods made by the hands of men are the works of the devil, and the testimony of Jesus declares that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. The word of God announces that all have sinned and are helpless to save themselves, and the testimony of Jesus is that Christ died for our sins. The word of God teaches that eternal punishment awaits all unrepentant sinners, and the testimony of Jesus is that only those who accept the redemptive work of Christ on Calvary can save a man from hell. The word of God teaches that death is not the end of all living—that there is a resurrection from the dead—and the testimony of Jesus proved it. The word of God teaches that those who practice sin cannot inherit

eternal life, and the testimony of Jesus demonstrated the import of that truth.

John taught an either/or religion—either go the way of the true and living God as revealed in Jesus Christ or be lost forever. Is it any wonder then that men were cut to the quick? They liked their religions which made no demands on their lives, permitted them unrestrained license to do anything they pleased, and palliated their consciences with a form or a ritual of religion.

They tried to discredit John but their own faces turned red. They tried to kill him, but failed at every turn. So they condemned him to a fate well known as worse than death—they deported him to Patmos.

But John had something real. In a situation far worse than any of us have ever known or can imagine, John could say, "I was in the Spirit." Like Joseph of old, his faith could stand to be transported. On Patmos he could write to unseen Christians and, without crying over his misfortune, could cheerfully declare, "I John am your brother, your companion in tribulation, your partner in patient waiting for the kingdom of Jesus Christ."

I don't know if John ever changed Patmos; he may never have been able to win a convert in that cesspool of iniquity. But this I know: Patmos never changed John! His experience in God was true, and he never lived "under the circumstances." John lived *above* the circumstances.

What's your Patmos? I'm sure it's real and that it is most disagreeable. You are tempted to wonder if

God has forgotten you. The loneliness overwhelms you. No one around you even seems to care.

But remember John. And remember that your loving heavenly Father outlines your itinerary on this planet. You don't need a change of locations or a different set of circumstances. Get "in the Spirit" and see what God can do through you—right where you are.

IT HAPPENED ON PATMOS...

Patmos is a small island in the Aegean Sea. In New Testament times it was an Alcatraz—a prison island. The foulest and most corrupt of human flotsam and jetsam were abandoned there.

The apostle John—that “disciple whom Jesus loved”—was exiled there “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” There, by divine revelation, God showed him “things which must shortly come to pass.” And he wrote them in a book.

Those papers written on Patmos long are pertinent today. The messages are predictive and practical. They show us the things to come and they instruct us in day-by-day Christian living.

Revelation 1:1-9, the introduction to the book, lays the foundation for all that follows. Without the basic truths of this introduction, the predictions of wrath will produce terror. Within the heart, however, we pray, “Ev



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